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THE KISSISSOOM FOREST

LEPCHA LAND

OR

SIX WEEKS IN THE SIKHIM HIMALAYAS

BY

FLORENCE . DONALDSON

WITH A MAP SHOWING ROUTE, AND 106 ILLUSTRATIONS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY P. AND F. DONALDSON

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TO MY HUSBAND

PREFACE

IN offering to the public this slight sketch of a brief sojourn in the Sikkim Himalayas, I do so with no pretence of adding to the scientific or historical knowledge of the district. But I hope it may interest some of the many whose work in life makes it impossible for them to indulge in the love of travel which has developed so greatly among all classes of British society. In this account of what may best be described as a prolonged picnic in one of the byways of the Himalayas—where Time still walks on crutches—I have attempted no description of the flora and fauna of a country which, though it offers few facilities for sport, boasts a marvelously luxuriant vegetation, and is said to possess a hundred different species of orchid. Nor have I made more than a few necessary remarks on the history of the different races to be found in it. All this has been already done. The following pages—written at the request of friends—are only intended to describe a journey among new and interesting surroundings, undertaken in 1891 just after a fresh awakening on the part of the Indian Government to the political importance of Sikkim. But, at the time, desire for extended influence was checked by Chinese diplomacy, and the prospect of more friendly intercourse put still further back by the enduring antagonism of the great Lamas of Llassa. The last nine years have made

little outward difference either in the country or in our position. The permission to make a traffic depôt at Yatung—a few miles beyond the Jeylap Pass—proved a very trifling concession after years of diplomatic angling. It was found to be too bleak and barren a spot to be of any sort of commercial value. But during the past year there has been a renewal of the agitation against the influence of China, which so hampers the natural trade between Hindustan and Tibet. Current events, however, and the probable parcelling out of Chinese territory, are likely to open the flood-gates of Western civilization. But when this comes to pass, “Lepcha Land” will be a misnomer, and another primitive, patriarchal and peace-loving people will have died out.

F. D.

Simla, 1900.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.

CALCUTTA TO SILIGURI

	PAGE
Planning a holiday—Where to go—The buffer state—Sikkim—Preliminary arrangements—"Chhumbi" and "Tuko"—Off at last—An amusing incident—Siliguri . . .	I

CHAPTER II.

SILIGURI.

The Terai—Baggage coolies—Tuko's last swim—A tiger story—The planter—A visit to a tea garden . . .	9
--	---

CHAPTER III.

SILIGURI TO KALIJHORA.

Making a start—Seevok—A tiger jungle—The road to the Teesta—A night at the dāk bungalow	18
---	----

CHAPTER IV.

KALIJHORA TO KALIMPONG

Rearing Bustee—The valley of the Teesta—A halt—We climb the hill to Kalimpong	29
---	----

CHAPTER V.

KALIMPONG.

Stiffness—Kalimpong—The inhabitants—The station—Women workers—The kazi—View of snow mountains from Rinkimpong—Christian schools—A marriage—Lamas blessing a new house	37
---	----

CHAPTER VI.

KALIMPONG—(*Continued*).

Picnic at the Teesta—An afternoon visit—Tibetan tea—Lepcha dances—the Rilli—Market-day—Hill babies—Morning service—Fetish-worshippers	51
---	----

CHAPTER VII

KALIMPONG TO PAKYONG

	PAGE
Coble characteristics—The Kalimpong Goomba—A fertile valley—Rissoom woods—Our syces—The Kotal—Pedong bungalow—A subaltern's room—The Plug—A steep hill—The copper mines—The Belle of Pakyong	60

CHAPTER VIII

PAKYONG TO SEDONGCHEN

An early start—Rhenok Bazaar—Up hill and down dale—A broken bridge—Rongli Chu rest-house—A midnight visitor—Marital jealousy—A mountain torrent—A waterfall—Delicious water—Sikhim roads—A stiff climb—Chhumbi's birthplace—Sedongchen—A detachment of soldiers—Oul chota-haziree party	76
---	----

CHAPTER IX

GNATONG

Gnatong Fort—The dāk bungalow—The effects of rarified atmosphere—The mess house—Headache and mountain sickness—Bromhead Point—Kinchenjunga—The use of dogs	92
--	----

CHAPTER X

GNATONG TO LAGYAP-LA

The road to the pass—The Jeylap—A peep into Tibet—Our camp at Kufu—Intense cold—A Sikhim gorge—An awkward situation—A stiff climb—Moraines—A barren hill—Tiphu—Camping in snow	109
--	-----

CHAPTER XI

TIPHU TO GUNTOK

A frozen tent—"Robinson Crusoe" to the fore—Lake Tanitso—The poisonous rhododendron—Yaks—A precipitous descent—The Roro Chu—A Bhoota's house—Leeches—A morning levée—The Rajah's road—Guntok	126
--	-----

CONTENTS

ix

CHAPTER XII

GUNIOK TO RAMIEK

	PAGE
The Intchi monastery—Lamas—The Rajah's palace—A young disciple—The mess house—Ponies troubles—Picnic to Penlong-La—Setting out again—Wayside seats—A bank of beauty—A wire bridge—Ramtek Goompa—An improvised bedchamber—Balustrade of prayer-wheels—The big wheel—Bad news of the road—Tuko's strange behaviour	142

CHAPTER XIII

RAMIEK TO LINGTSE

A pugdandy—Scaling a rock—The landslip—How we crossed it—A Jacob's ladder—A wayside cascade—Marian—A Bhoota village—Work and laughter—The Rani's rest-house—Teptook's writing—Likobu—Lingtse—A Nepaulese tamasha—Amenities of coolie life—An arrival—Developing photographs—Travellers' postmen	157
---	-----

CHAPTER XIV.

LINGTSE TO SANGACHELLING.

Crossing the Teesta at Lingtse ferry—Advantages of a small pony—Orange trees—Rajah's road—Yangong Goompa—A well-stocked lake—Repairing a hand-camera—A tree bridge—Preparing our camp—Luxurious Nepaulis—The Giezhing Mendong—Chairs—Pemiongchi—A fern-bank—A rock staircase—The deserted Goompa	171
--	-----

CHAPTER XV

SANGACHELLING TO CHIAHHANJAN.

Scotch mist—Sunrise from Sangachelling—A hard case—Road messages—A bamboo bridge—Dentam—A Bhoota rest-house—A steep climb to Chiabhanjan	192
--	-----

CHAPTER XVI.

CHIAHHANJAN TO DARJEELING

Camp food—Travelling southwards—An old crater—Panorama of snow mountains—Singulela—Phullut—A view of Mount Everest—Broad roads again—Sandakhu rest-house—Silver firs—Tanglu—Above the clouds—A bag of letters and newspapers—Arrival at Darjeeling	201
--	-----

LIST OF FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
The Rississoom Forest	<i>Frontispiece</i>
A tea garden in the Terai	10
A Tea Planter's Bungalow	12
The Teesta River	31
The Teesta suspension bridge	35
The Kazi of Kalimpong	44
The River Rilli	55
The Kotal	67
Rongli Chu Bungalow	80
The Rongli Chu	82
View above Sedongchen	90
The Lingtu Road	92
The Fort, Gnatong	94
The Jeylap Pass, showing the wall built by the Tibetans	114
Loomhang, the Lepcha sirdar	120
Lamas	143
Waterfall near Penlong-La	149
On the road to Ramtek	154
A wayside cascade	161
The Teesta at Lingtse Ferry	169
Pony swimming the great Rungeet	184
Bamboo bridge, Dentam	198
On the road to Darjeeling, near Phüllut	206
Darjeeling	210
Map of the North-Eastern Trans-Frontier, showing route through Lepcha Land	

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE TEXT

	PAGE
"Chhumbi"	7
Siliguri	8
Verandah covered with Indian matting	13
A tea factory	16
Entrance to the forest	22
Kalijhora rest-house	25
The Raing	30

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

xi

	PAGE
A broken bridge	32
The end of the cart-road	34
View of the Runjeet	38
A Kalimpong hill-side	39
Kalimpong	41
Building the hospital	43
Woman weaving	45
Native students	47
Native Christian girls	48
The bed of the Teesta	52
Teesta ferry-boat	53
Dandy men and Mahomedan servant	54
Hill woman and girl	57
The goods depôt	61
Kalimpong Goompa	62
A Nepauli homestead	63
A Bhootea group	64
Nepauli traveller and coolie	65
Pedong bungalow	68
The Rarhi Chu	71
The Pakyong Mela	73
The Belle of Pakyong	74
A bit of the road	77
Rhenok	78
Sikhim Bhooteas	82
The Rongli Chu Fall	84
Pademchen	86
Chhumbi's birthplace	87
Coolies preparing their evening meal	89
A halting place	97
The road to Gnatong	100
A Bhootea group at Gnatong	101
Gnatong	103
British soldiers at Gnatong	104
Mother and child	105
Fuko La	106
"Robinson Crusoe"	110
Looking into Tibet	112
Looking towards Sikhim	113
Our hill tent	116
Our camp at Liphu	127
The coolies' corner of our camp	128
The "Plug"	131
The Roro Chu	136
Sikhim Bhooteas	137
Interior of Intchi Monastery	144
Guntok	146
Old mess-house, Guntok	147
Coolie girls resting	150
Travelling lamas	151

	PAGE
One of our coolies	152
A forest scene	155
A wayside rest	162
Lingtse rest-house	165
Out-houses at Lingtse	166
Ponies crossing the ferry	172
Our camp at Bading	175
A bamboo forest	178
A bridge we crossed	179
Rabongla Forest	180
The snows from Barphung	182
The snows from Lingdamtso	183
Giezhing Mendong	185
Mani on the road to Pemiongchi	186
Sangachelling goompa	187
The deserted monastery	188
Pemiongchi monastery	189
A Mani	190
Sunrise from Sangachelling	193
Dentam rest-house	200
The snows from Singalela	203
The snows from a hill near Chiabhanjan	204
Phullut rest-house	206
Tonglu rest-house	209
Cloud scene at Tonglu	211

LEPCHA LAND

CHAPTER I.

CALCUTTA TO SILIGURI.

Planning a holiday—Where to go—The buffer state—Sikkim—Preliminary arrangements—"Chhumbi" and "Tuko"—Off at last—An amusing incident—Siliguri

It was one afternoon, during a break in the rains a few years ago, that my husband and I, reclining on long cane chairs, exhausted with the steamy heat and with the effort of trying to read, first seriously mooted the question of getting away to the hills on privilege leave. Calcutta had been specially trying, but when indeed is it otherwise? As we mutually agreed that we needed a holiday, it was not long before we had definitely decided to apply for one, and began busily counting up the leave due to us, and arranging on what date we should go.

It was already late in August, and we found that the six weeks' notice required in applying for leave would bring us near to the Durga Poojahs. The Poojahs, as they are commonly called, happened to fall at a convenient time, and there was a possibility of getting them as well as the thirty-four days due to us on the accumulative system of official leave. Rather more than six weeks altogether! This would, indeed, be worth trying for, and our spirits rose at the thought.

The question of where this holiday should be spent involved the most careful consideration, and the oppressive heat was forgotten in eager discussion of trips by land and sea. We were both good sailors, fond of the water, and had often meditated a visit to the Andamans or to Burma ; but October was the month of cyclones, and we felt hardly equal to being lashed by the tail of the monsoon in the Bay of Bengal. Darjeeling was vetoed at once. We had no wish to stay at this fashionable hill station. We had lived in the mofussil, and knew what it was to long for the civilized society of our fellow-countrymen. After vegetating for months in monotonous routine of work and up-country isolation, we had longed to share in the amusements and frivolities obtainable at a hill station ; but now we had been some years in Calcutta and yearned for a thorough change and freedom from restraint.

We could have enjoyed the globe-trotter's trip, and have spent our weeks roaming from city to city, haunting the busy marts and religious head-quarters of the many different races and creeds of Hindustan ; or in studying the ruins of old dynasties, and musing over the relics of a past civilization ; but interesting as this could not fail to be, it would not give us the cold air and bracing climate we craved, and indeed, considered a *sine quâ non* of a holiday. At any cost we must fly the plains. The beautiful Neilgherries would give us the tonic we needed, but entailed a long, hot and fatiguing journey of many days. Kashmere appealed to us in all the romantic imagery of Lalla Rookh, and the perfume of the Garden of Roses came wafted on the wings of imagination as we conjured up its far-famed beauties ; but sober matter-of-fact reminded us that it would take at least a fortnight to reach Srinagar, and remembering that it was the land of the tourist, we turned from it as from an evil to be avoided, and voted it too far.

Among the many difficult problems requiring to be solved from time to time by our statesmen, and those in authority in India, none is more important than the great question of how best to guard our frontier. What the sea does for the British Isles, or the established policy of civilized nations to maintain inviolate the recognized boundaries of a country, are both factors wanting to the preservation of our Indian empire. The natural boundary of a great mountain range is of little avail when so many races and peoples are ever on the watch to overrun us : whether in the nomad spirit of pure love of marauding, and simple delight in adventure for such booty as they can find, or egged on by some greater power in the background, that, if successful in thus forcing an entrance, might pour down and overwhelm us. The policy of the buffer state is the only safe one, but necessitates constant vigilance, and leads, as we have so lately experienced, to frequent arguments with our wild hill neighbours.

It was after the days when our Afghan difficulties had been so brilliantly settled, and before the Manipur disasters, that the attention of the Government was turned towards Sikhim. This mountainous country, lying in the Eastern Himalayas, is the buffer state between us and Chinese Tibet, and unexpected friction rose with the ruling Rajah. He showed undue favouritism to his Mongolian neighbours, and we naturally resented it, whereupon the Tibetan plumage was ruffled, and they tried to peck at us. Preferring to carry the war into the enemy's country, we marched quietly through Independent Sikhim, and had our skirmish with the Tibetans on their own borders. A few scratches, followed by much *kowtowing*, and the scribes took up the case. But the correspondence promised to be lengthy and far-reaching ; and while the courteous interchange of English parchment

with Tibetan palm leaf backed by highly-decorated Chinese paper went on, it was thought that matters might be facilitated if we established a small garrison on the frontier for the benefit of our buffer state. The Sikhim Rajah was not as grateful as he should have been, and he fell somewhat into disgrace. But these matters developed slowly. Echoes from the British garrison on the heights stationed at 12,030 feet above sea-level, and near the Jeylap Pass, were wafted down to Calcutta and awoke much interest there, for in no other part of the world, surely, had English soldiers been called upon to live in so rarified an atmosphere. At one time there was a prospect of a great embassy to Llassa, and it was the talk of Calcutta for a whole season. There was much packing up of scientific toys and tooth-brushes, to be presented as the offerings of civilization, and tender farewells were taken of the favoured few selected to enter this land of the sealed gates. But somehow the procession never got further than Darjeeling, and the undertaking had to be classed among the things "that might have been."

The district in which this favourite sanitarium was built had once belonged to Sikhim, but was bought by the English Government from the ruling Rajah. Subsequent treaties gave us wider sway over the southern spur of the Eastern Himalayas, and resulted in our possession of British Sikhim, and the adjoining British Bhutan, lying still further to the East. Tea gardens had sprung up rapidly on the sunny slopes in these districts, Christian missions had been established in the centres most easy of access, and here and there a small house had been erected for the brief visits of the political or forest officer. The occasional traveller, therefore, was always sure of a hospitable welcome, but the facilities of getting about were too few to tempt many of the tired plains folk. Independent Sikhim had been barred to all visitors, unless by special

permission, until within the last few years; but now that we had a political agent stationed in the heart of the country, and this temporary British garrison on the heights, English travellers could climb the mountains where they chose in safety.

Now it happened that a mission friend and fellow amateur photographer, living in British Bhutan, but whose mission extended over Sikkim, wrote to us during those few days in which we had been vainly trying to decide where to go in our holiday, and describing the beauties of the country, said, "he often wondered that no amateur photographers came to explore a neighbourhood where every step offered such perfect subjects for the camera"

"That is just the place for us," exclaimed my husband, as he put down the letter; "I will write to him at once and see what help and advice he can give us if we start on an exploring tour through Sikkim."

I was only too willing to carry out such a novel idea: it would entail daily riding, constant change of scene, pure bracing air, and be a sort of prolonged picnic. We were both fond of photography and had plenty of apparatus at our command.

The letter was soon written and brought a prompt reply, satisfactory in every way, besides being full of information and advice as to what we should require to take with us. On the strength of it D. sent in his application for privilege leave, and asked to be allowed to take in the Poojahs. It is always wisest in such circumstances to expect success, and make all preparations for departure in anticipation of sanction, though the possibility of being refused at the last moment lends a spice of excitement which adds something to the craving to get away. In this case there was so much to do and to think about, to plan and arrange, and prepare for the march, that the trying weeks of steamy heat passed far

more pleasantly than usual, though they left us about as washed out and run down as most other Anglo-Indians who have spent years in the enervating climate of Lower Bengal. Packing went on slowly but steadily, and every day added something to the definiteness of our arrangements, so that by the time D received the official sanction to his privilege leave, nearly all our heavy baggage had been forwarded by the Teesta Valley bullock train to Kalimpong, the capital of British Bhutan, there to await our arrival. We had been warned not to count on any food supply in the unfrequented regions we were going to, so I bought stores of tinned provisions and packed assortments in 20 lb boxes, convenient for coolies to carry, and containing in each one sufficient to satisfy all our wants for a few days together. This prevented the necessity of opening more than one box at a time—a plan we afterwards found of immense advantage. Cooking utensils and enamelled crockery were carefully selected and packed in a special basket. Warm clothes for the higher altitudes, as well as cooler ones for the valleys, were stowed away in light wicker trunks, covered with waterproof canvas to keep out the wet. Several dozens of photographic plates, besides chemicals and spare apparatus, were also sent on in advance; and when all had been despatched, we turned our attention to getting ready the things we should have to take with us. Tents were to be provided at Kalimpong, and hill ponies would be procured for us at Siliguri by a tea-planter in the Terai, at whose house we were to spend a night on our way up.

The first day of the Poojahs arrived, and everything was ready. We had bundles of warm bedding with thick, new blankets, our own saddles, together with bits, bridles, and other accessories required for hill ponies, a box of food for the one Mahomedan servant we took

with us ; our personal luggage ; three cameras, and the two small hill dogs we had owned for the past year, and who were important members of the party. They were named respectively "Chhumbi" and "Tuko." The former was a Bhootea dog about the size of a rough-haired English terrier. His long coat was bright fox colour set off by a coal-black muzzle, white breast and paws, and a fine bushy tail curling half over his back. "Tuko" came from Tibet—brought over by traders—when a tiny puppy. He was about the size and colour of a Dandie Dinmont. His black coat, soft as cat's fur, was marked something like a tabby's, while his short paws and curly tail were tipped with cream colour. Both were good watch-dogs. On reaching Sealdah station, we found it crowded to excess with hundreds of people of all classes going to Darjeeling for the Poojah holidays. Two long trains were required to find room for all the passengers, and were despatched following each other. Every seat was occupied ; the heat was stifling, and we were all tired enough when we reached the Ganges, and had to take to the steamer by which passengers are ferried across this mighty river. Here we found a comfortable dinner served on deck, and enjoyed the soft wind that blew across the water and refreshed us even more than the food and drink.



"Chhumbi"

We were not inclined to rouse up very early in the morning, after a somewhat broken night's rest, and the sun was well up when we began to dress. The train stopped at Jalpaiguri before we were ready, and I let down a window to look out and enjoy the fresh cool breeze blowing from the hills. "Chhumbi" looked also, and then to my horror suddenly jumped out and made for

some long grass opposite. I could only seize "Tuko" lest he should follow his companion's example, and call to my husband who was in the adjoining bath-room. A shout to "Chhumbi" was only responded to by a joyful wag of the tail, and in a moment D. had opened the door and ran after the culprit, picking him up and regaining the carriage just before the train started, and



before he had realized that he was in his shirt-sleeves, and with the tooth-brush he had been using when the catastrophe happened still in his hand. How we laughed! Poor "Chhumbi!" he couldn't understand being shut up in a shaky train on such a deliciously cool morning. Another hour and we were at Siliguri, where we had breakfast, and bid farewell to friends in the train who were going on up the hill.

CHAPTER II.

SILIGURI.

The Terai—Baggage coolies—Tuko's last swim—A tiger story—The planter—A visit to a tea garden.

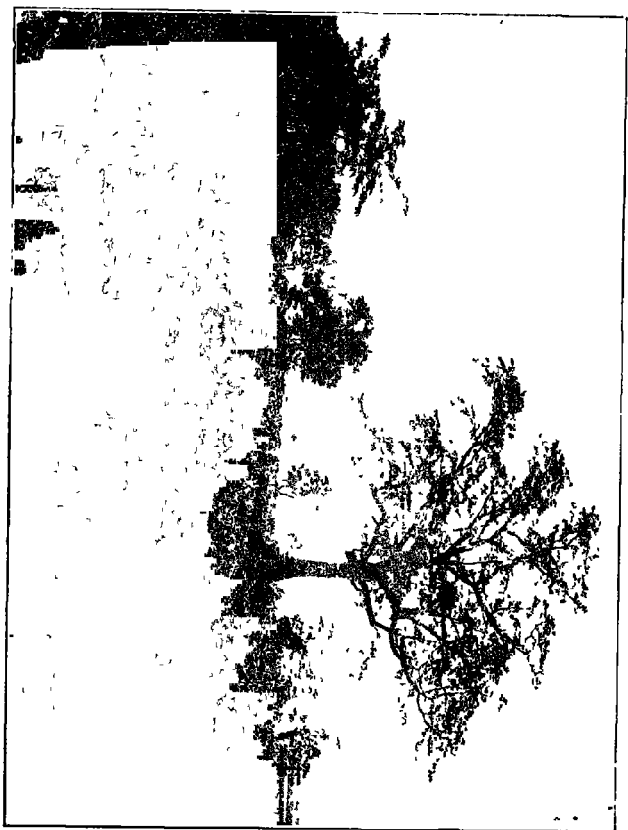
AT the base of the Himalaya lies a broad strip of land known as the Terai : a name with which we have learned to associate that wasting fever, so fatal to Europeans, and to the terrible ravages of which an enormous percentage of the natives themselves succumb. Besides a heavy rainfall, averaging something like 120 inches in the year, this strip of land is the natural drain of the Sikhim hills. The rivers running through it are continually overflowing their banks to flood the ground for miles around, and the surplus water, being unable to get away, must be slowly absorbed by the already super-saturated earth. The dense vapour, raised by the tropical sun, is laden with pestilential malaria. The shelter of the hills tends to prevent the free passage of air, so the vapour lies over the ground until the fresh winds of the cold weather months sweep it away, and bring some measure of restored health to the fever-stricken inhabitants.

If the first man who had the jungle cleared to make room for the planting of tea could have foreseen the cruel loss of life his example would entail, he would surely have avoided so great a sacrifice. It was an evil hour for Terai planters when the Forest Department forbade the periodical firing of the overgrown jungle,

which had hitherto done something towards purifying the air of the district, and now, after years of cultivation, and when every effort has been made to improve the conditions of life, the Darjeeling Terai remains as unhealthy as ever.

Siliguri lies just on the edge of the Terai, 700 feet above the sea-level, and a few miles from the foot of the mountain range. Dark masses stood out in a low line against the sky, and seemed close to us as we looked up at them. We were nine miles from our friend's bungalow, and a light bamboo cart had been sent to the station to meet us, as well as several coolies to carry our baggage. These miserable-looking beings were such a contrast to the well-nourished Bengali we had been accustomed to, that we thought them fitted for the hospital rather than to carry heavy loads, but our compassionate feelings were relieved when we saw that they had no intention of over-burdening themselves. Each man carried a *bhangy*—a sort of rude scales, or flat basket, suspended at either end of a bamboo pole yoked across the shoulders. It was amusing to watch the careful, deliberate way in which they arranged and rearranged our things, until the balance was just right, and the load exactly to their minds. It is an interesting fact that in the wide variety of weight-carrying coolies, with their different ways of loading themselves in various parts of India, all seem to have little or no idea of actual weight, and will carry willingly, or otherwise, as the bundle is, or is not, to their minds.

Nazir, as the servant we brought with us was called, was sent on with the coolies, as they would take a short cut across the fields, and he could thus look after his own belongings, which might prove more attractive to the natives than any of our luggage. The dogs, who had been enjoying their freedom from the restraint of railway



A tea garden in the Teian.

travelling, capered about with every demonstration of delight as we got into the trap and drove off.

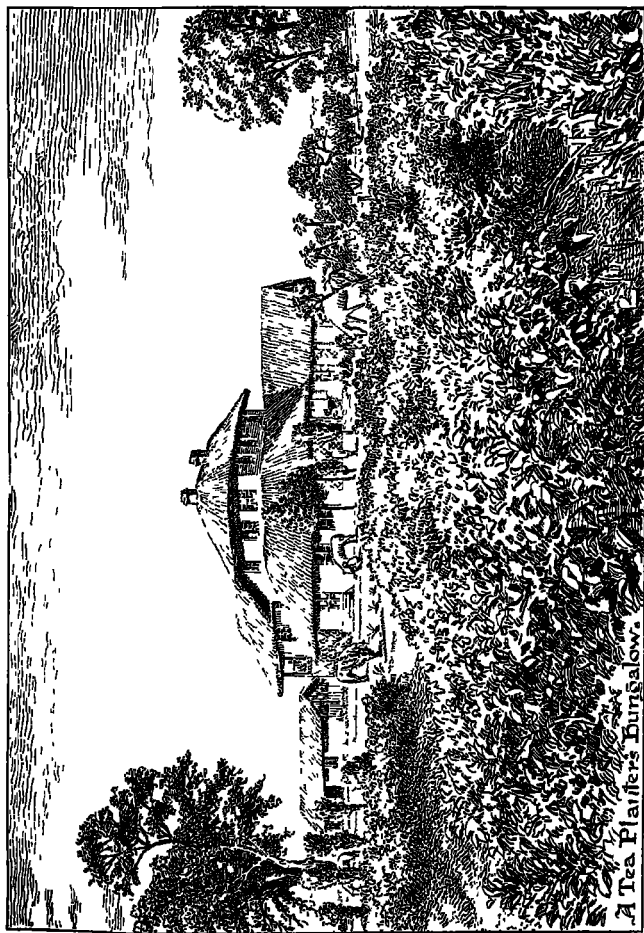
For some way the road was smooth enough, but by-and-by we came to a tolerably wide river which was bridgeless, and had to be forded. The pony we were driving was evidently quite accustomed to this sort of thing, and picked his way carefully down the bank, though every step was followed by such a tremendous jolt that it was amazing we were not overturned. When well into the stream, which here was fortunately not more than 3 ft deep, he stopped to have a drink, so we waited and watched the dogs. Chhumbi, a true water dog, plunged joyfully in, and swam boldly across. Tuko followed his example, but having short, little legs, like a Dachshund, he was a poor swimmer, and we saw him carried away by the current, which was too strong for him. The syce jumped down and caught poor Tuko, just as he was being turned over in his struggles to save himself, and we took the poor, drenched doggie into the trap, where he soon got over his fright, but never forgot it, and from that day forward nothing would induce him to attempt to swim across the narrowest stream: he always waited to be carried.

We got over the ford without any further mishap, and D., who had been in the neighbourhood before, pointed out the different tea estates, and told me the following story in connection with one of the bungalows we saw in the far distance. The bachelor planter living there was entertaining a lady and gentleman visit or when the conversation turned upon tigers, and he told them how his servants declared that one was prowling about the place. Perhaps it was after a young calf, but he thought tigers would hardly venture so near the house. The lady remarked that it would be interesting to see one in the open. A few hours later the visitors prepared to depart,

as they had to catch the evening train. It was only 6 o'clock, and the station was not far off, so they started to walk to it, accompanied by their host. The road lay through a bit of jungle, and just as they reached it a magnificent tiger suddenly walked out on to the road not fifty yards in front of them. For a few moments they all stood still, petrified with fear, while the tiger turned, looked calmly at them, and then quietly continued his way across the road into the jungle opposite, and disappeared. With a shriek the lady fled back to the house, and her companions followed her the tiger had probably got as great a shock as they had, and was seen no more, but neither was the young calf. D had just ended this thrilling story, and I had begun to look uneasily at the tea bushes, when a turn in the road brought us to our destination, where we were received with that cordial welcome which has made the planter's house so popular.

The unmarried tea-planter generally has a sufficiently good and well-built bungalow, but seems to have so little idea of how to surround himself with even the most ordinary home comforts, that the visitor frequently finds little more than matted floor, with camp table and a few rickety chairs in the sitting-room, while a camp bedstead and old box or two seem all that is considered necessary for the bedroom. The plentiful supply of food, left to the control of the *khansamah*, is more substantial than refined, and all the minor luxuries and delicacies the hospitable host perceives to be wanting to the entertainment he endeavours to supply by pressing upon his visitor frequent "pegs" of the best whisky he can procure.

The married men, on the contrary, generally live in all the luxury and refinement that is so notably absent among their less fortunate brethren, and the pretty house to which we were now welcomed was instinct with that



A Tea Planter's Bungalow.

spirit of order and cleanliness, combined with culture, that has made the English home superior to that of any other nation. The floor of the one-storied bungalow was raised several feet above the ground, and had the usual thatched roof. A wide verandah, covered with Indian matting, ran along the whole front of the house ; and as we sat in comfortable long chairs, with the reed blinds down to keep out the sun, we could see the gay, tropical garden through them, and smell the scent of sweet



Verandah covered with Indian Matting

English flowers planted all about the verandah. It was difficult to realize that so fair a spot should be so deadly from poisonous malaria, but we had only to look at the faces of our host and hostess to know how trying the climate must be.

When the heat of the day was over, and we had had tea, daintily served in the verandah, our host proposed that we should ride through the garden and see the factory. Mrs. H. lent me her pony, a pretty grey, half

Arab, with perfect paces, and D and our host being mounted also, off we started.

The first tea bushes were within a stone's throw of the house, and extended over hundreds of acres in all directions, belonging either to our friend's or some neighbouring property, and broken only here and there with a wide but shallow river, a clump of forest trees or bit of waste land waiting its turn to be planted out and added to that already cultivated. The tea bushes presented a curious appearance to the uninitiated, being low, broad and flat as a table. In some parts they were quite clear, in others so crowded with weeds that one realized how great must be the labour of keeping the ground free from them. Some of the plants were of a darker colour with small leaves, and others of a lighter tint with larger foliage, the first being the China plant, and the latter, and better of the two, the Assam hybrid.

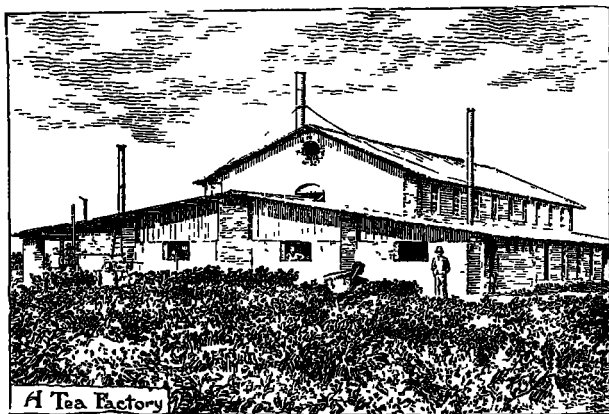
The roads, or paths through the tea, were often execrable, and at times we had to ride along in single file. Our host led the way, and frequently called to us to beware of the holes, or rotten planks, in the many little bridges spanning narrow watercourses or irrigation drains. Here and there we saw groups of coolies, women as well as men, busily plucking the four top leaves from the young shoots. They were of the same unhealthy, wretched-looking type as the men we had seen in the morning, and no wonder, poor creatures, when they so often had to pluck the leaf standing knee-deep in water, with a burning sun overhead. They were picturesque enough, however, with their nondescript costume of rags and long bell-mouthed basket strapped over their shoulders.

As we rode along Mr. H. gave us further information about these workers; and told us how the original inhabitants of the Terai, long inured to the climate and

comparatively healthy, were few and scarce and declined to leave their small agricultural clearings among the forest jungle to work in tea gardens, preferring to migrate to other districts. Managers, therefore, had to look elsewhere for their labourers, and generally sent *sirdars*, or overseers to Chota Nagpore to beat up recruits, making some sort of agreement with them and their families for a season's work. These poor people knew little about the climate they were going to, and were nearly always too ignorant to take even the most ordinary precautions; and when they fell ill, as the majority were bound to do, it was often impossible for the manager to persuade them to take the medicine freely doled out to all. Coolie lines were built for them on the best sanitary conditions possible, but the poor wretches died like rats in a hole rather than take the English medicine they had no faith in. Sometimes cholera broke out amongst them, and then, panic-stricken, they were apt to bolt *en masse*, leaving the distracted manager almost without labour at the busiest season of the year. It is difficult to know what laws could be framed to help masters and coolies both under such circumstances, but in the interests of humanity something should be done to check the appalling mortality in the Darjeeling Terai.

On reaching the factory, we dismounted, and were shown the whole process of making tea. When the coolies bring in the baskets of leaf they have plucked, it is first weighed and then put on shallow canvas trays in the withering houses, where it is left all night to wither. In the morning it is put into the rolling-machine and rolled for half an hour, when it comes out a wet mass of leaf. Portions of this are then put on other trays and left to ferment until the proper aroma is obtained. There is a deliciously fragrant smell in the house devoted to this process. The tea is then dried in a machine by hot

blasts, and when ready is thrown into a gigantic sieve—also moved by machinery—which separates the Pekoe from the larger leaf. There is more sifting and picking over by hand for the finer sorts of tea, and a final drying is given to it before it is taken to the packing house, and put up for the wholesale market. The tea season was drawing to a close and would be quite over in another month, when the pluckers would return to their distant homes until the following hot weather.



It was not quite dark when we got back to the house, and I had time to see the kitchen garden and well-stocked poultry yard—an important factor in housekeeping, so far from shops or stores of any kind—but I was still more interested in a show of white chrysanthemums which seemed to flourish marvellously well in the Terai climate, and surpassed any I had seen in India. Two young assistants joined us at dinner and enlivened the party with many an amusing story of planter's life; and though a sad tale of broken health and shattered constitution cropped up occasionally, one could see that they took a

healthy enough view of their surroundings, too careless of consequences for the most part, and when I heard of their riding fifty miles, without pause or rest, merely to spend a couple of days in the society of some popular planter, it seemed to take the stigma of unsociability from our race.

CHAPTER III.

SILIGURI TO KALIJHORA.

Making a start—Seevok—A tiger jungle—The road to the Teesta—
A night at the dâk bungalow

AFTER a refreshing sleep, undisturbed by erratic punkah-wallahs, we awoke in the morning to feel a delicious freshness in the air, to which we had long been strangers. We had been wakened by the coolie call-bell, and, as the last tinkle died away, turned to sleep again with some realization of the subaltern's idea of pleasure in being roused for *réveille* just for the delight of remembering that he was off duty and could lie on in bed.

The day was still fresh and young when we were up and out. In the clear air we caught a glimpse of the Bhutan snow-peaks rising in the far distance just above the outline of the near hills, and the sight seemed to promise pleasure in cool regions and novel surroundings. We were soon busy arranging and despatching our somewhat miscellaneous belongings. A bullock-cart was in readiness to take our luggage to the Teesta Bridge, and when everything was piled up in it in a sort of pyramid, our servant Nazir took his seat on the top, making an odd picture of a living statue on a pedestal. He looked very proud and satisfied on this somewhat shaky eminence.

We next turned our attention to the two ponies kindly procured for us by our host. The larger of the two was

a Bhootea pony, shaggy-haired, cream-brown, and rather antiquated, with a reputed tendency to bolt for the first twenty yards, by way of protest at the indignity put upon him of having to work for his living after three years of easy life. • A long cream-coloured mane and tail formed his chief beauty, but his shape was good and the graceful arch of his neck showed Arab blood and good breeding. His peculiar colouring had won him the name of "Ginger." Though not up to long marches, he proved a useful animal, and with clipped coat and good trap-pings was very generally admired during our journey. The second pony was a little brown creature, so small that at first we were doubtful of his fitness for the work, but he was young and sturdy, and we were likely to travel where small size and goat-like characteristics would be of the first importance. He was a Tibetan animal, having been brought down by some officer as loot from Lingtu in the recent skirmish on the frontier, and would therefore be quite at home in the hills. He was named "Lingtu," but was generally called "chota-wallah."¹

We had brought up saddles and bridles, as well as the special arrangement of breast-plate and crupper necessary to prevent the saddle slipping over head or tail when going up and down the steep hills. Besides this we had stuffed *nundahs* to make our horse saddles fit comfortably on the narrower backs of our new steeds, very necessary in the case of the "chota-wallah," and successful in preventing any trouble with sore backs. All these things we fitted on before packing them into the bullock-cart with the warm blankets and grooming paraphernalia we had brought with us. The driver took his seat in the cart, seized the tails of his beasts, gave them the usual twist, and off the cavalcade started, with many directions to make good speed and not loiter on the way.

¹ Little one

As the day wore on the sun got very hot. It was pleasant to lie on long chairs in the verandah after breakfast, with chicks down to keep out the glare, and talk to our friends of their life in the Terai, and listen to their accounts of the tea season, which was just now at an end, and the prospects of the coming year. We could not wait till sundown, however, with a twenty-two mile journey before us in a strange district, and so prepared to start directly after tiffin.

At 2.30 p.m. the old-fashioned, locally-made gig, in which we were to drive, was brought round to the door. Handbags, camera, luncheon basket, and a few wraps, were stowed away in the capacious corners of this unique conveyance,—innocent of paint, varnish or decoration of any kind,—but, as we proved by experience, exceedingly comfortable, with wonderfully easy springs, and altogether just the sort of thing for the rough ways we had to cross. The dogs careered about wildly as soon as they realized we were going somewhere, and we bid farewell to our friends. Chhumbi flew round to the poultry-yard in an ecstasy of excitement, and so frightened a poor duck by his sudden bark, that the bewildered bird succumbed in the course of the day, as we afterwards heard, from the violent shock to its nervous system. Then he and Tuko were lifted into the trap to ride for a while, and climbing up ourselves we set off, feeling that this was the real beginning of our journey, and that we were ready for adventures of any kind.

For the first six miles we retraced our steps towards Siliguri, and then turned into the road to the Teesta. Here our way lay through open level country, and we drove leisurely along, letting the dogs scamper after us, until we came to a small village called Seevok, some six or seven miles beyond Siliguri. We had only met a few coolies and an occasional bullock-cart on our way, and this

village bustee consisted of about a dozen native huts or shops on either side of the road, with a few smaller dwellings in the background. Here we found that the cart with our luggage had only just passed through, and our ponies, with their syces, were still resting after their middav meal. We lost no time in sending them on their way.

So far we had come quickly and pleasantly along, but had now to change horses, the one that had brought us was to return home, and we were to take on another that had been sent to Seevok the previous night. While this change was being effected we had got out of the trap, and, at the invitation of one of the natives of the place, seated ourselves on the floor of a new hut then being built, and drank ginger-beer from the luncheon basket. As we did so a poor idiot boy came up, gibbering and gesticulating, muttering unintelligible sounds, expressing nothing, but full of gentle insinuation. On inquiry we found that somewhere in his poor brain flittered the feeblest spark of understanding that money was to be desired, but on receiving the coveted pice, he would hide it carefully away and forget all about it. It speaks well for the simple goodness of the native that this idiot boy was looked upon as the common property of the inhabitants, being carefully tended and fed by them all, with no need of almshouse or compulsory maintenance laws.

It was nearly five o'clock when we continued our journey, and rather regretted loitering when we found—as indeed we had been duly warned—that the pace of our new steed was marvellously slow: coaxing, abuse, shouts or whippings were of no avail, three and a half miles an hour was the speed suited to the dignity of this “Rajah,” as he was named, and nothing whatever would induce him to increase it by one *iota*.

A mile or so brought us to the edge of the forest through which our road lay, and as we drove into it we left the

sunshine behind us, and found dim twilight with a chill, damp atmosphere, which made us glad to use our warm wraps. Gradually the growth around us became thicker and more impenetrable. The tall sal-wood trees, with their straight, slender trunks, were surrounded with thick jungle growing to the height of some six or seven feet, and



Entrance to the forest

so closely knit together that no human being could pass through it. Here and there were long lanes, cut through in straight lines, at right angles to the road; narrow clearings made to facilitate the work of the forest officer. The rank smell of the decaying vegetation betrayed the generator of malarious poison, and sundown was the worst time to face it. The dogs had been taken up for safety from

snakes and leopards, with which the forest must abound, but the creepy sensation caused by the solemn stillness, the inky blackness, and the dreariness of our surroundings, was enhanced by the realization of the fact that we were in a well-known tiger jungle, and even now the king of the forest might be at hand, searching for his prey.

The slow pace of our unwilling and stolid horse increased the general feeling of uneasiness, and some natural alarm at the possibilities my imagination conjured up only too readily, made us agree that if ever again we had to travel through this forest, it should be in broad daylight only. We soon overtook the bullock-cart and ponies, all keeping close together for company. The syces seemed to think they had the worst of it, and were so frightened of tigers that we gave them one of the hurricane lamps we had with us. This, added to the light of the bullock-cart, brightened them up considerably, and we drove on, feeling confident that whatever the distance before them, they would come on with the cart rather than spend the night on the road alone. At one time D varied the monotony of our progress by making a great effort to induce "Rajah" to bestir himself. He stood up in the gig, flourished and cracked the whip first in his ears and then on his rhinoceros hide, but "Rajah" twitched his skin as though a fly had touched him and made no other sign. Sudden shouts, angry expostulations or tugging at the reins had no effect whatever; our friend continued his way at the same pace, neither slackening nor hastening his steps, in a manner that, aggravating as it was, was admirable in its absolute unchangeableness. We gave up the contest with a laugh; and succumbed with quite a friendly feeling to the phlegmatic temperament which admitted no hurry and bore no resentment.

The long drive through the dark, damp forest, with only a few yards of the white road before us lighted up

by the shifting rays of the carriage lamps, came to an end at last. A faint, white light broke through the overhanging trees, we were at the edge of the wood, had passed that thick wall of jungle grass, and in a few minutes were out into the pale moonlight and on the open road. There was light enough to see something of the surrounding country, which was more wooded and less cultivated than on the other side of the forest, and we came to a small group of huts, seemingly deserted, but in which the dwellers were probably already sound asleep inside, to be up and out before daybreak. By and-by the road terminated at the bank of a wide, but shallow, river course, now high and dry, and we had to send the syce exploring to find the road on the other side. Coming back, he led us through the stony bed, and the wheels scrunched the pebbly soil with a noise that made us feel half apologetic for thus breaking the stillness of the night. A turn in the road betrayed a rushing stream with broken bridge. This, too, we forded at imminent risk of an upset, but happily regained our much-shaken equilibrium, and found ourselves on the opposite bank in safety.

Another half mile, and a low, distant rumble, gradually increasing to the full, sonorous roar of a swift but deep river, told us that we were approaching the beautiful Teesta, and soon we turned into the cart road on its right bank, just a few miles above the spot where it reaches the plains, and flows on in a deep, wide channel, no longer wild, tumultuous and rushing, but calm and gracious, until it is lost in the embrace of the mighty Brahmapootra. We had just time to catch a glimpse of this magnificent river gleaming in the moonlight, with rocky banks and giant trees overhanging it, when the pale goddess disappeared and we were left in darkness, with only our flickering lamps to light us for nearly three miles along its banks,

high above the water-level, and in a road furrowed with ruts so deep that, unable to avoid them in the darkness, we had all the excitement of many narrow escapes of a game at somersault to keep us wide awake, in spite of no little fatigue.

At last we seemed to leave the side of the Teesta, and came to a smaller river which we crossed over a wide



Kalyhora Rest-house

bridge. This we guessed to be the Kalyhora, or Black Water, where the bungalow should be. The surmise proved correct, but we nearly passed the little cutting in the hill which led to the house, and should probably have done so but for a small shanty by the roadside, just opposite the path, which attracted our attention, and which the syce's instinct told him must be a stable for the use of travellers. He was right, and when he had found the bungalow, we left the trap and climbed the hill, feeling as though we were well into the night, though in truth it was little more than 8 p.m.

There was the rest-house sure enough, just visible in the dim light of our lantern, and after walking round the verandah and trying all the doors, we found a back one open and got in, but there was no sign of a *chowkudar*.¹ Further exploring in the outhouses discovered a small boy and girl, who told us that their father was away for a holiday and not likely to be back for a day or two. This

¹ Caretaker

was an unexpected *contretemps* in a place where we should have found a man in charge, able to get everything ready for us. The children produced and lighted some kerosine oil lamps, and then we told them to make a fire in the kitchen and put a kettle of water on to boil.

The two rooms of the dāk bungalow were furnished with all necessities, and the couple of spring beds, albeit they were minus mattresses, looked so inviting that we threw ourselves down for an hour's rest, hoping our Mahommedan servant would turn up in time to give us some dinner. We dozed for a while, but soon woke to the fact that we were ravenously hungry. D. went down to the stable to see that the horse had been properly groomed and fed, and came back with the syce's opinion that the bullock-cart wouldn't turn up for another couple of hours, so we decided to take the bull by the horns and try and get some food for ourselves. There was not much in the tiffin basket, but we had bread, butter, cheese, jam, and a tin of fresh herrings, as well as tea, sugar, and milk. The native boy was summoned: he could supply us with potatoes, but there was nothing else to be had. D. said he would do the cooking, if he could find utensils, while I hunted about for crockery and got the table ready. A well-filled almīrah in the corner of the room contained all I wanted, but D. was dismayed at the state in which he found the kitchen things, and we had a consultation about what was to be done. Soon afterwards, on going into the verandah for something, I found D. with his sleeves turned up in workmanlike fashion, peeling the potatoes with an expression of great seriousness.

"Do you know if these things stain your hands," he inquired, "my fingers are getting quite black."

"Oh, of course they do," I replied, suddenly remembering having been forbidden to peel potatoes for

that reason when a child, though allowed to shell peas occasionally. "Hadn't you better boil them in the skins?"

"That's a capital idea," said D, throwing down the knife with great relief, not so much on account of the stained fingers as glad to be saved the bother of peeling any more, and he disappeared in the direction of a faint light issuing from one of the outhouses. He was back again soon, and wanted some thin paper to fold the herrings in, with butter, before putting them on the grid-iron. This seemed likely to be beyond our resources, as newspaper might give an inky flavour not exactly desirable, but we found a piece of straw paper, with which D. went off satisfied.

I had finished my part of the preparations, furnishing the table with the before-mentioned accessories, and making hot tea for a beverage, as more refreshing and safer than cold water from the Kalijhora, and was just meditating a visit to the kitchen when D. appeared, looking very triumphant, with a smoking hot dish in each hand. One was heaped up with potatoes boiled in their skins, the other looked so comical that I couldn't help laughing even before I discovered that D. had wrapped each fish in well-buttered straw paper, screwed into a knob at one end to resemble a fish's head, and at the other into a spread-out tail that curled round like a porpoise's. This was a worthy *pièce de résistance*, and having dubbed it with the name of *harengs en papillotes*, accompanied with *pommes de terre à la robe de chambre*, we considered our dinner worthy of any *chef*, and sat gaily down to it. We had great fun over our meal, and had just finished piling the dirty plates on a table in the verandah, when the syce ran up to say he heard the bullock-cart close at hand. The few things we wanted were soon taken out, and by 11 p.m. the beds were made

and everything ready for the night. Lulled by the rushing of the mountain stream below us, we slept soundly, and knew nothing more till Nazir came with tea and toast in the morning.

We had another long journey before us, so were up early. A good breakfast made up for the deficiencies of our scratch dinner, and when all the men and animals had had their morning meal, we hurried off the baggage party, intending to follow in the trap an hour later. This gave us time to see something of the picturesque neighbourhood of the dāk bungalow, which was built on the top of a hill overhanging the junction of the Kalihora and the Teesta, and to take a photograph of this truly perfect site

CHAPTER IV.

KALIJDHORA TO KALIMPONG.

Reaing Bustee—The Valley of the Teesta—A halt—We climb the hill to Kalimpong

A LITTLE way over the bridge, on the road we had come the day before, was a magnificent tree. The colossal trunk surpassed anything of the kind I have ever seen, so that the great oak of Panshanger Park, in Hertfordshire, was small in comparison, and though this giant of the forest was in a somewhat inaccessible place, in the bank above, and it was impossible for us to measure it, it could not have been less than forty or fifty feet in circumference over the four enormous buttresses at its base, and it towered up into the heavens till it was lost to view, with its branches inextricably mingled with trees above and around it. It was in a shady corner, and at a turn of the road unfortunately, so we failed to find a position from which to take a photograph of this gigantic triumph of nature.¹

When again on our way we found the road both fairly good and level, passing through the wood at the bank of the river, with shade nearly the whole way and beautiful reaches at every turn. We overtook our vanguard some seven miles on, at a small bustee near the junction of the Reaing, and called a halt there, to give the animals a good feed of bamboo leaves—the general substitute for grass and hay in this part of the world—and started them off again before leaving ourselves.

¹ The natives could not give us the name of this tree, and we failed to learn it from Europeans. Hooker, describing similar trees in the *Himalayan Journals*, calls them a species of "Terminalia."

The scenery was too beautiful to pass without taking a memento of it; so we scrambled down the bank, and set up the camera on the dry stones of the river bed, and



The Reaing

took a view of the clear water of the Reaing as it rushes to join the Teesta. Following the path by the tributary on the road leading to Mongpoo, we came across a bamboo bridge which gave one an excellent idea of the



The Teesta River

native bridges of the district—sound in principle, ingenious in construction, but of flimsy material. The bamboo grows freely on the banks, and is easily cut and fastened together with cane or withes. But a new bridge must be made every year. No green wood will stand a rainy season, and the accompanying sketch shows the usual condition of the bamboo bridges after the rains, if, indeed, they have not been washed away altogether. This one collapsed suddenly three weeks after our picture was taken.

Leaving the vicinity of the Reaing, we again drove along the cart-road on the right bank of the Teesta, and feasted our eyes on its beauty. Every turn of the river, in the seven or eight miles to the Teesta bridge, was a new delight. We were journeying northwards, and the water flowed toward us with infinite variety in its appearance. Clear, bright, and glistening in the sunshine, with the graceful, overhanging trees and white boulders of its banks mirrored in the transparent blue borrowed from the sky, dark and deep, as it wound into the shadow of its sylvan woods and showed a black depth of water with unrippled surface, betokening deep and dangerous pools in its channel; or again, broken up into lines and splashes of milk-white foam as it rushed impetuously over some rocky obstacle in its path, and betrayed the speed and strength of its rapid current. In each and every phase it was glorious in its exceeding beauty.

The grand forest on either side grew thick and close right down to the water's edge. Bamboos, rhododendrons, shrubs and forest jungle filled every available space under the larger trees, making an impenetrable mass of undergrowth, through which the cart-road, along which we drove, had been laboriously cut, and was now carefully kept up, supported by walls made of stone from the river bed, where heavy rain or trickling hill streams,

washed away portions of it from time to time and necessitated further cutting into the bank or building up from below, besides frequent small bridges of bamboo or stone across the natural water-courses which drained the hills on either side.

Numbers of little green parrots flew into the air as we rattled along under their favourite trees ; and chattering



A broken bridge

monkeys scuttled away at our approach, making the dogs wild with excitement, and screaming their contempt for Chhumbi as he dashed up and down the steep bank in vain attempts to seize them. Water-fowl rose occasionally, but D. had no gun with him, and even if he had it would have been a difficult matter to secure the dead birds when they fell. At this part of the river the opposite bank was untrodden by men, but haunted by the small brown bear of the Himalayas, and here and

there we could see tracks of wild animals, and note where they came down to drink and then climbed the hill to cooler heights above.

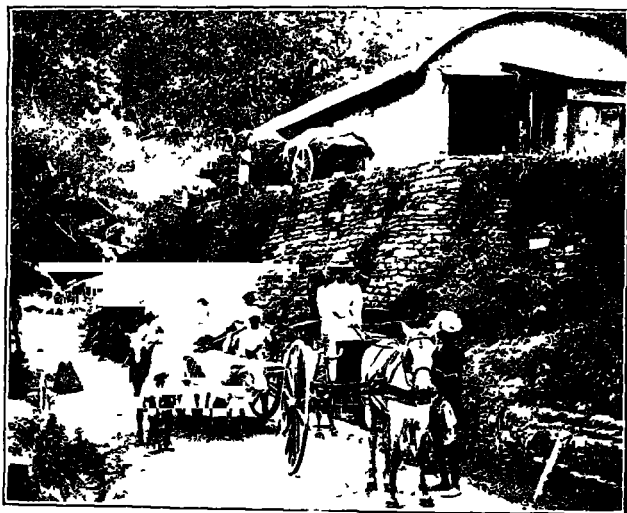
As we drove along, continually stopping to admire or photograph some point of special beauty, the hills gradually increased in height and spread out in long ranges, with gentle slopes and quiet curves, but the sides of the river became more and more precipitous, till they



seemed to be almost perpendicular to the water, and the distant ranges added their charm to the ever-changing vistas of the road. ' It was a scene of the most picturesque beauty, and endless variety of colour, outline and character; a spot to love and linger in. But the hot sun beating down on us made the valley stifling. The few coolies who lived there, to facilitate the traffic to Sikhim, were only too certain victims of the deadly fever which, in this part at least, will for ever preserve the

natural beauty and solitariness of the Valley of the Teesta.

As we drew near the bridge the road widened. Native huts and shops lined it on either side, making a small bustee for the coolies and drivers of the bullock train, by which all goods were sent into Sikkim. It ended with the dāk bungalow on the one hand, and the goods depôt



The end of the cart-road

on the other, and close by the substantial European suspension bridge, over which our road now lay.

Our whole party having arrived about the same time, between 2 and 3 p.m., we dispersed in search of rest and refreshment, sending a few coolies up the hill with what luggage we needed for the night, and with a note to announce our arrival. We had already done a fairly good day's journey, but even at the risk of overtaxing ourselves and our ponies, we determined to climb the hill to



The Tescin suspension bridge

Kalimpong that night. The road was seven miles by the short cut, and meant a pull of 3000 ft., but it was better to make the attempt than to spend another night in the Teesta Valley. We could start a little before sundown and finish the journey by moonlight. Nazir, who had been in the bullock-cart all day, would have to walk, so, as soon as he had had some food, we started him off with a coolie, to show him the way and carry his luggage. "Rajah" and the trap, with the empty bullock-cart and one syce, who had fever and was evidently unfit for work in the hills, was sent back in it. They would return to the Reaing bustee for the night and get back to Siligui the following day. We had taken photographs of the bridge and changed our thin clothes for warm riding apparel. The ponies were saddled, and we prepared to start, accompanied by the one syce left, who was a native of Kalimpong, and as anxious to get there quickly as we were.

With a last lingering look at the beautiful Teesta, here some hundred yards wide, and 800 feet above sea-level, we crossed the bridge, and found the railings on either side decorated with little bits of white and red cloth inscribed with Tibetan prayers, and fastened there by travellers to blow in the wind and waft propitiatory offerings to some tutelary deity. A naively pleasant idea, akin to the wax candle of Roman Catholicism.

The first mile or so was a zigzag up the almost perpendicular hill side, and the position required to keep one's balance in the saddle was as new an experience for us as the road itself. The ponies were quite at home, however, and though certainly not in condition for much work, they brightened up considerably at first, and, remembering former days, both they and the dogs showed they were to the manner born.' It was warm work for the first few miles, and the thirsty animals often stopped to drink at

wayside streams in true hill fashion. Passing through a thick forest, progress was easier, as the road was less steep, but the syce soon turned aside and led us up the "short cut," over a barren rocky hill, so steep that it proved a real trial to us all, and the heat radiated from it as the sun went down till we were quite exhausted. We came to the top at last, and now the moon shone out and the cool hill breezes fanned and refreshed us.

The hardest part of the road was over, and D., who had been walking a great part of the way, turned back to mount "Ginger," following with the syce, when, being somewhat in advance and going very quietly in the stillness of the evening, my little pony, tired out, or having fallen asleep, dropped suddenly down and rolled on his side. Luckily for me he had chosen a wide place in the road and turned inwards, or I might have been over the *khud*¹ with very little warning. Disentangling myself from the stirrup without difficulty, I got up unhurt but shaken, and the pony quietly did the same. On hearing what had happened, D. gave me his pony, as we had still two miles to go, and walked himself.

For the rest of the way the road was good. Turning a corner, we came in sight of the Kalimpong hill, lying about a mile away, with its white houses shining in the moonlight. A somewhat circuitous route brought us to the native bazaar of the little station, above which our friend's house stood, and at the door of which we arrived about 9 p.m., thoroughly tired, but very glad to be at Kalimpong.

¹ Precipice

CHAPTER V.

KALIMPONG.

Stiffness — Kalimpong — The inhabitants — The station — Women workers — The kazi — View of snow mountains from Rinkinpong — Christian schools — A marriage — Lamas blessing a new house.

WE were to spend some days in this interesting station to get acclimatized to the strong air of the hills before attempting higher altitudes; to make arrangements for native coolies to carry our camp furniture, and the numerous boxes of stores and luggage which had all arrived safely at the bullock train dépôt; and to see something of this cosmopolitan capital of British Bhutan. Those only who have lived for years in an enervating climate in the plains can appreciate the peculiar pleasure we experienced in the pure bracing air, the mountain scenery, novel surroundings, and that free out-door life of the inhabitants, in which we intended to share as far as English characteristics and the necessities of civilization would allow.

It was hardly surprising that we were painfully stiff after our long drives over rough roads, ending with that first pull up a hill, equally trying to unused muscles whether on foot or pony back,—but it was ludicrous to see the effect it had on the dogs. Both were so sore for a day or two that they could hardly move and looked quite crestfallen. An occasional cry from some quiet corner of the room, meant that one or other was getting up and

couldn't understand the twinge it gave him. They were hoarse, too, from barking violently at every hill-man they had met the day before, but now that the novel dress was universal they decided to tolerate the natives of the land, and turned their attention to the study of their own species.

Mr. and Mrs. G., our kind host and hostess, showed us everything in the place, and we were constantly entertained and interested in all we saw.

Kalimpong is on the saddle of a hill just above the



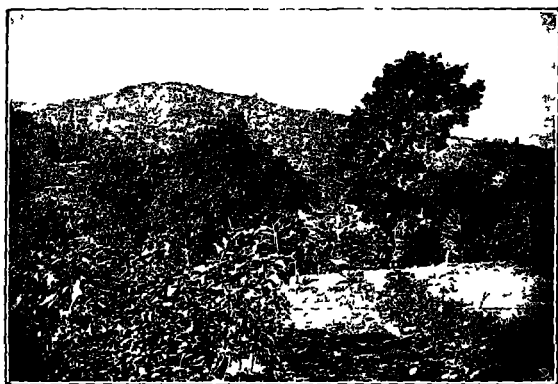
View of the Runjeet

Teesta Valley Not more than 4000 feet high, it enjoys the most delightful climate, and seems never without a fresh and invigorating breeze. It is surrounded by higher peaks on all sides but one, which overlooks the valley of the Runjeet—with range after range of hills sloping gently up from the river bed. We found it almost impossible to photograph this beautiful view, as eternal mists hang over the water, except when fleecy clouds lie low upon it, and look like a broad layer of white wool. The river flows into the Teesta just above the Suspension Bridge, the

“meeting of the waters” being a spot of great natural beauty, where the two rivers flowing alongside each other, with distinctive colour and character for some way, gradually blend together, when the rapid torrent of the Runjeet becomes absorbed into the calmer, deeper water of the Teesta.

In the early morning, before the mists rise over the mountains, the snowy range can be seen in the far distance.

The hills round Kalimpong are broad-topped with easy



A Kalimpong hill-side.

slopes, covered with verdant pasture, or well-cultivated fields of maize, millet, or potato, groves of tamarind or mulberry trees, and orchards of the delicious tree tomato, which seems to be a speciality of the district. The fruit is shaped like a plum, and is about the size of a duck's egg, slightly acid and of a delicious flavour, and is not only easily cultivated, but the tree bears fruit nine months in the year. Here and there the hillside is dotted with the neat thatch-roofed bamboo hut of the labourer, or the better built stone-walled house of the well-to-do Nepauli

cultivator. The soil is fertile, the crops good, and the bright, smiling scene is reflected in the beaming faces of a happy light-hearted people.

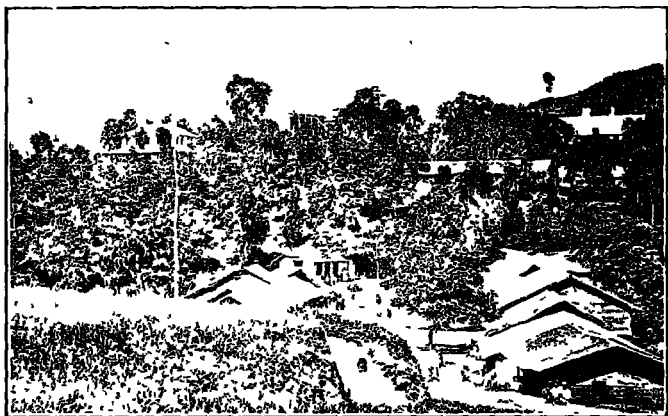
The Lepchas are the original inhabitants of Sikkim, and are a most interesting race. A gentle, peace-loving people, they have been repeatedly conquered by surrounding hill tribes, and their ancient patriarchal customs are dying out. Their rich and beautiful language has been preserved from probable extinction by the efforts of the late General Mainwaring and others, but their literature was almost entirely destroyed by the Tibetans, and their traditions are being rapidly forgotten. Once free and independent, they are now the poorest people in this mountainous country, and it is from them that the coolie class is drawn.

The Limbus are another tribe, speaking a distinct language. They are found also in Nepaul, but are so like the Lepchas in habits and customs that they continually intermarry. Living and working with the above are the Nepaulese who have emigrated from their own country. They are agriculturists, workmen or syces for the most part. Intelligent and industrious, but naturally extravagant, they require greater personal comfort and better houses than the Lepchas.

On the Tibetan frontier, and nearer the snow line, live the Bhooteas, a hardy, well-to-do people, rich and independent, but often aggressive and quarrelsome. Beside these are the Tibetans, traders and dwellers in the monasteries. The principal lamas are all of this nationality, they are the spiritual rulers of the country, and have great power and influence over the natives. The four races, living in close contact and constant intercourse, are as yet entirely distinct. A very short time enabled us to recognize the different peoples, and added to the interest of travelling in Sikkim. They were all well repre-

sented in Kalimpong, this being the central mart and trade depôt of the country, and in touch with the plains of India.

The station consists of a native bazaar built on the levelled ridge of a hill. This is a long, broad road with huts on either side placed in as even a row as the sloping sides would allow. The structures are of wood, with roof of corrugated iron or thatch, the front part being a shop, and the back the family dwelling. At one end, on



Kalimpong.

somewhat higher ground, are the buildings of the Scottish Guild Mission, the highest point being occupied by the Macfarlane Memorial Church. The tower was unfinished when we were there, but has since been completed. The Manse, where we were staying, is to the left of the church in the picture. Mr. S., the head of the Sikhim Mission, and Superintendent of the Training Schools, has a house similar to the Manse on a hill just behind the church, and which commands a fine view of the snow mountains. The Mission houses are well built and comfortable, very

superior to those of the ordinary hill station. At the other end of the bazaar, also on higher ground, are Government offices, a dāk bungalow for travellers, and two or three spare houses, used by various officers who visit the place occasionally on inspection tours, beside Rajah Tendook's house and a few others

The only new building in course of construction, when we were there, was the Guild Hospital, and we were much interested in seeing the natives at work on it. The actual erection was done by men under the control of a Bengalee contractor, and the ubiquitous Chinaman was there as head carpenter ; but the heaviest labour, the carrying great blocks of stone, was performed by women, who are strong and hardy as men in these hill districts. They are commonly engaged in tasks which, in our eyes, seem unfitting to their sex, but at least it is unanswerable proof that, given the same physical training, there is no reason why women should not be as strong and muscular as men. When young the hill women are good-looking and bright, but often hideously ugly in old age. Those we saw working at the quarries were plump and well-nourished, with rounded limbs and upright carriage, but very dirty. They wear a thick, coarse cloth over their heads, and carry the huge stone on their backs, supported by a leather strap from the forehead. Their children hang about, carrying younger ones strapped to their shoulders, and even babies soon learn to take care of themselves.

Besides their religious teaching, the Scotch missionaries in Sikkim are, like the Puritans of old, pioneers of civilization, and are doing incalculable good by helping to develop the resources of the country and to introduce new industries among the inhabitants. Silkworm rearing was started by them, and has already been a great success. The silkworm is indigenous in these hills, and the mulberry tree grows wild. Mr. G. took us to see the

principal rearing house. The Lepchas seem to have no antipathy to the curious disagreeable effluvia ; and it is hoped that in time every hut will have its silkworm corner. A trader in Kalimpong purchases the silk in small quantities, and sells in bulk to European markets.

The day after our arrival we were informed that the Kazi, or headman, had come to pay us a visit. He was invited into the room where we were sitting, and shook hands in orthodox fashion when presented to us. He was a Bhutanese and of most handsome appearance. Tall, good-looking, with high aquiline nose and clear, dark complexion ; dressed in a long garment of rich claret-coloured silk, with a turban-shaped hat of black felt, and English patent leather boots that creaked with every step in a most imposing manner. Besides his official position as agent for the Bhutan Government, he was a trader in hill ponies, and general dealer in curios, and we had already heard that his house was well worth a visit.



Building the hospital

After a general interchange of compliments, and talk about our journey—in the arrangements for which he promised to help us—it was settled that we should return his visit the following morning and inspect the things he had for sale.

On arriving at his house, we found it surrounded by high flag poles, with long white cloths fluttering in the wind. These were the prayer flags with which Buddhists encircle their dwellings and monasteries, in the belief that every breath of wind carries the supplications inscribed on them to their gods

The house, built of stone, mud, and wood, was large

and roomy. The ground floor seemed to be used for stores of grain and lumber, and the staircase leading to the upper storey was little more than a rough ladder. Once up, we were taken into the show-room, a bright little place, with the walls hung with shields, swords, knives of all kinds and musical instruments; tables covered with brass gods, elephants, prayer wheels, plates of beaten copper, *pán* boxes and teapots; rough chests full of silk-embroidered robes and ornamental cloths: and at one end of the room, taking up the whole side, the family altar, decorated with brass vessels filled with marigolds, wooden tea cups and bronze idols of many-limbed gods and goddesses, with the Gautáma Buddha, smiling his ineffable smile of serenity, calm and majestic in the centre. The ornamental wooden framework tipped with gay colours, the handful of flowers stuck here and there, the painted bowls, and dark bronze-gold tints of the figures were picturesque enough to appeal to the educated eye as much as to that of the hill people. Reverence for, and belief in the power of the images before him, must make these altar-pieces very sacred to the Buddhist, and we found we could never buy anything taken off them.

Having purchased a few specimens of Bhutan and Tibetan manufacture, we were taken into an adjoining room, which was evidently the general living room of the family. It was black with smoke from the open fireplace. A wrinkled dame, reclining on a dingy-looking bed, was introduced as the old mother, now unable to walk.

After paying our respects to her, we climbed down the primitive staircase and went to inspect the few ponies in the stables, accompanied by the Kazi and his sister. On this occasion the former was gorgeous in yellow silk brocade, the latter being gaily but less richly clad. She was a pleasant-faced, good-tempered looking woman, but



The Kazi of Kalinpong

had no claim to beauty, and was much disfigured by ugly, prominent and broken teeth. This we found to be a very general circumstance among the hill tribes, in direct opposition to the common idea that simple food and out-door life gives better teeth than the modern civilization of Western nations.

In the compound¹ of the house sat a woman weaving cloth in the simple fashion of the country. The handmade material thus produced, though slowly made, is



Woman weaving.

almost everlasting in wear. The weaver took no notice of us, and D. was able to get a shot at her with a hand-camera.

This interested the Kazi so much that he immediately preferred a request that we would take his photograph. It was easy to see that our friend was not without a sufficiently good opinion of his personal appearance. He would like to be taken seated on his pony in state and dressed for the occasion. We agreed to do our best, provided he would wear native costume entirely, eschewing

¹ Garden or courtyard.

English boots. He was quite willing, and the next day turned up at the Manse at the appointed hour. Smarter than ever in another silk robe striped in various colours, long boots, and handsome inlaid sword and Tibetan fire pouch; seated on a fidgety grey pony, gorgeously caparisoned with scarlet trappings, and led by a smart syce, followed by an equally grand attendant carrying the *pán* box, he looked and felt a very superior person indeed, and I was delighted at the opportunity of seeing and photographing the Kazi of Kalimpong thus dressed in gala array.

As the snowy range was about a hundred miles distant in a straight line, the view was nearly always obstructed by the mists which hung over the intervening hills, but in the early morning it was generally clear and distinct. The best view obtainable in the neighbourhood was from the summit of the hill Rinkinpong, about three miles distant, commonly called, on account of its position, The World's End.

D. and I were eager to go there, so got up one day at dawn and rode out into the raw morning air, up the hill and along the ridge overlooking the Runjeet, with its usual covering of white, feathery cloud, through gentle hollows and uplands till we came to a sudden turning in the road behind a clump of trees, which hid the view at this point so effectually that it added to the surprise and delight awaiting us at the top. A last little climb and we found ourselves on a flattened knob of a hill with just room to dismount by the side of the cairn erected there.

We were on the edge of a grand precipice, with the Teesta flowing at our feet like a silver thread in the valley below; and beyond in the far distance the marvellously beautiful snow mountains, tinged with rosy hues from the rising sun, glistened and shone against the sky. It was a glorious sight, and more than repaid us for our cold ride,

and we watched the sunlight spreading and lighting up the whole range into dazzling whiteness, and then took photographs with the telephotographic lens and lingered till the mists, which hung over the plains, began to rise, and wrapped themselves round the base of Kinchenjunga till the great double-peaked mountain seemed floating in a sea of cloud.



Native students.

It didn't take long to get back; our ponies wanted breakfast as much as we did.

Afterwards Mr. S. came and took D. to see the Young Men's Training School, while I stayed to photograph Mrs. G.'s class of Christian girls. It is of great importance to the missionaries that young converts should be educated and able to teach others when they return to their villages. We heard many stories of the natural difficulty in bringing these untutored youths and maidens into any comprehension of the need for regularity and

discipline, but once fairly started on the road to knowledge they followed it readily, and were generally a credit to their teachers. Sometimes parents brought their children to be taught, and sometimes the latter came at their own wish.

Two Nepaulese girls in the elder class had desired to become Christians against the will of their parents. They lived in a distant village, and had run away from



Native Christian girls

home together, wandering about in the jungle with nothing but wild berries for food, until found by a Native Christian and brought safely to Kalimpong.

A young Bhootea girl was to be married that afternoon to a convert, who had come from his village that the ceremony might be performed by the mission *padre*. I was glad of the opportunity of seeing it. Most of the hill marriages are arranged by the parents, but in this case

the lovers were old friends, and it was said to be a real love match. The bride was a pleasant, happy-looking girl, nicely dressed, but wearing over her head,—as the height of fashion, Mrs. G. told me,—an English bath towel with red border and fringe complete. The man had a good face, was very serious during the ceremony, and beamed with satisfaction afterwards. We followed them outside, and saw them turn to walk away in different directions. The newly married always do this, Mrs. G. said, but she called them back and sent them off together,—an innovation to which they made no objection.

At intervals through the day we had heard the blowing of a horn, loud, shrill, and resonant. A grand Buddhist ceremony was being held near by at the house of a well-to-do Bhootea who had just built himself a new dwelling, and this was the inauguration or house warming. Many Lamas had come into Kalimpong for the purpose the day before, and we had met them all over the place. Warmly clad, but in the dirtiest and dingiest of red garments, with an essentially low type of face, full of greed, cunning and vice. We were both surprised and disappointed in the appearance of these spiritual leaders of the people and exponents of the sublime philosophy of Buddha.

There was no objection to our seeing what was going on : indeed, the proprietor seemed pleased to have us as witnesses of his well-doing. In front of the house women were hard at work preparing great bowls of food and arranging them on low trestles, jars of *marwa* were placed alongside, and a thirsty Lama could slip out and help himself as often as he liked. The staircase was outside the house. On climbing up, we came to a small outer room or vestibule, from the door of which we looked into the large inner room where the ceremony was being held. It was badly lighted, and at first we had some

difficulty in penetrating the gloom, but gradually made out that thirty or forty Lamas were seated on the floor round the four walls. The chief among them were in front of the open fire-place, while a few moved about turning prayer wheels, blowing the long horn, or waving incense burners. A rapid, mumbling, half-chanting repetition of prayers, invocations to Buddha, gesticulations and prostrations went on continually, increasing in vehemence or subsiding to the comparative quiet of a few voices.

The heat and stench coming from the ill-ventilated room, filled with the unwashed devotees of the monastic order, was sickening, and we were glad to get away from it. If this was the process of spiritual purification, we felt that it would entail a very liberal material cleansing if the household were to dwell there with any comfort afterwards.

CHAPTER VI

KALIMPONG—(*Continued*).

Picnic at the Teesta—An afternoon visit—Tibetan tea—Lepcha dances—The Rilli—Market-day—Hill babies—Morning Service—Fetish-worshippers.

BEFORE we were up the next day, our good host had set off on one of his periodical visits to the Christian converts in the outlying villages, and was absent for the next two or three days. We had been invited with our hostess to picnic on the banks of the Teesta with the Deputy Commissioner of the district, then spending a few days at Kalimpong.

Mr W met us in the bazaar, and we turned into an unfrequented road at the back of the hill and made our way down the steep path leading to a part of the Teesta higher up than we had been before, and above its junction with the Runjeet. As we descended the hillside through thick forest jungle, the road was quite deserted. Sometimes a fallen tree blocked the path, or it was so covered with leaves that we had great difficulty in following it. At last, however, we saw the water gleaming through the branches, and made our way to the stony bank of the channel, under water through the rains, but now high and dry. The best spot was soon selected, and we all did ample justice to a substantial and excellent luncheon. D. and I afterwards climbed over the stones, taking views of the river bed, while our companions

amused themselves by crossing the water in a dug-out, stationed there for use as a ferry-boat.

Returning home, Mrs. G. and I lessened the fatigue of riding up so steep a hill by taking turns to be carried in a dandy or shoe-shaped sedan chair, supported on poles and placed on men's shoulders. Darkness came on before we



The bed of the Teesta

were half-way up, and having no light with us, we had uncomfortable thoughts of the bears known to haunt that particular hill, one having been seen quite recently within half-a-mile of the Kalimpong bazaar. Happily, the men-servants were alarmed on their mistress's account, and just as it got almost too dark to see the road—so that the more immediate danger was that of falling over the preci-

pice—a servant came in search of us with a lantern, and the remaining distance was traversed in safety.

Rajah Tendook was away from home during our stay in the neighbourhood, but we sent word to his wife that we should like to call on her, and, in reply, she appointed an afternoon for our visit

A typical Bhootea woman, bright, intelligent, happy-natured, with well-developed physique and slight tendency to *embonpoint*, she received us with a kindly, genial manner, and showed off her fine little children with evident pride. She was well-dressed, in bright coloured garments of dark-blue and red, and wore on her head the usual coronet of red lac set with large turquoises. Handsome ear-rings and a medallion studded with smaller pieces of the same blue stone, with long double necklaces of large uncut stones and pieces of jade and amber mixed, with an occasional bead of red lac, gave her a very smart appearance. She spoke so little Hindustani that the conversation fell to Mrs. G., who had accompanied us, and acted as interpreter.

Tea and oranges were brought in for our refreshment, and we saw the former poured out in a thick, dirty, pea-soupy stream, with an inward shudder, but curiosity forbade us to lose this opportunity of taking tea in Tibetan fashion, so we allowed the servant to fill our cups with the nauseous-looking mixture, and wished they had been wooden instead of china ones. D. and I furtively watched each other to see the effect of the first sip, and struggled



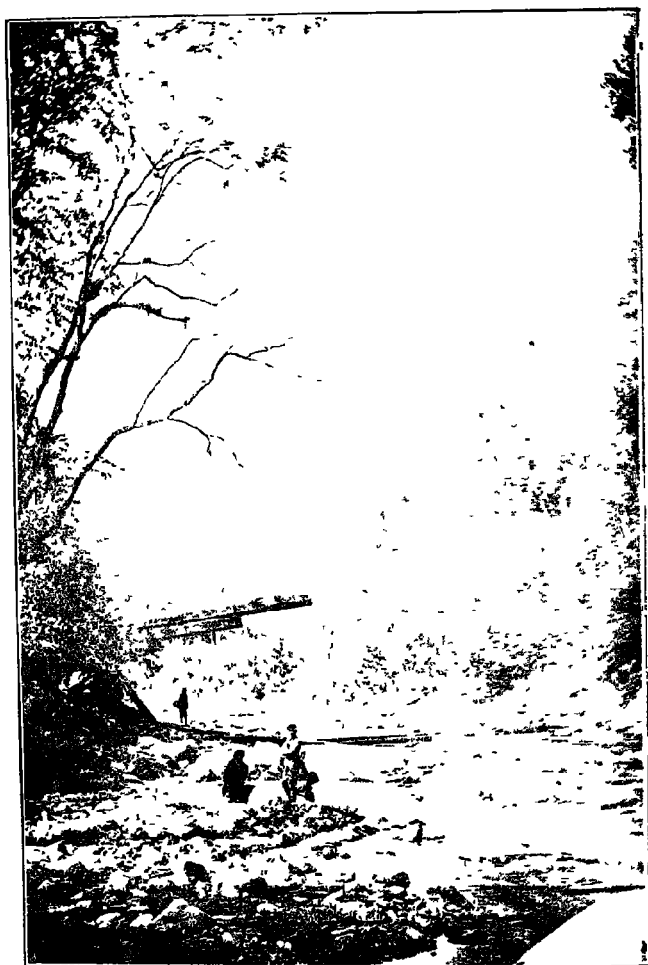
to keep a serene countenance. I was careful to make my first essay when our entertainer was occupied in talking to Mrs G. They say one can acquire a taste for what is really a very nourishing beverage, but the process of doing so must be a terrible one. Brick tea, hot water, more or less smoky, native butter, ashes—to promote digestion—and various other condiments and spices go to make up this renowned drink. We had soon swallowed as much as we dared, and then got Mrs G to explain that we had



Dandy men and Mahommedan servant

already drunk tea before leaving her house, so could not take much more.

A pretty sight awaited us on our return. Little David, the eldest son and heir, a bright-eyed, laughing boy of three years, was to have a birthday party of Lepcha boys that evening, and a few little fellows had already arrived. They had started Lepcha dances in the verandah, and we all stood and watched them with the greatest interest and amusement. The acknowledged leader of the group was a slim, lithesome little Lepcha, of some nine or ten years, who turned and swayed, stamped his heel and clapped his hands in the gyrations of the dance with a



The River Rill.

grace and charm of his own, and in so strikingly characteristic a manner that little Davy had caught the style and movement wonderfully, and was following his example in the prettiest way possible, seriously and with his whole heart in the performance. Games followed, and the little guests of all sorts and conditions showed that they had as much power of hearty enjoyment as any English children. Then they went up to the nursery to a feast of curry and rice, cake and sweets, and Davy was so enamoured of the little dancer that he sat with his arm round his neck and insisted on his having a Benjamin's share in everything.

D. and Mr. S, who was a zealous photographer, had been developing in the latter's dark-room in the meantime, and had obtained some good negatives, but the water we had to use in the Sikhim valleys was so full of chalky deposits that it spoilt many of our best pictures.

The next day we started off on another picnic expedition, with the object of meeting Mr G on his way home. The place we were bound for was in an exactly opposite direction to the Teesta, being on the bank of the Rilli, a river on the other side of the Kalimpong ridge. Not more than 1000 feet down, it was a much easier ride than the last, and we arrived in good time. The bridge was broken as usual, but there was a ford, and our ponies took us across without difficulty. We found a shady knoll with a pretty view of the water, and took a photograph of it while the servants unpacked the luncheon basket.

One hears a long way in the clear air of these hills, and there were signs of Mr. G's approach some time before we saw him and the two planter friends accompanying him. We made a merry party, stories and anecdotes circulating as freely as the excellent pie our hostess had sent with us. One was of a well-known clergyman of the Scotch Guild Mission, whose work lay among the tea plantations, and who was said to be too sweeping in his

condemnation of the managers and their assistants. One of them had retorted with a poetical skit on him, containing the following lines worthy of Pope:—

“ He classes planters ’mongst the souls unblest’d,
And burns their bushes on his Mission’s cresset ”

The point of the reference is, of course, the burning bush which with the motto *nec tamen consumebatur* forms the device of the Church of Scotland

The next day was Sunday, and we were roused by the unusual noise and bustle of a great concourse of people. It was bazaar day. I dressed quickly and joined Mrs. G., as she was setting out to make the necessary purchases for the coming week. The scene was lively and interesting. From one end of the bazaar to the other the road was packed with traders of all kinds, and villagers from the neighbourhood for miles around. The general costume was highly picturesque, but the personal want of cleanliness in three-fourths of the crowd was very literally obtrusive. The sellers squatted on cloths or mats with their wares spread round them. They seemed to have no special place in the market, but took any vacant corner. Mrs. G. knew a good many of them, but there were always crowds of strange faces.

Most of the women had children strapped to their backs with folds of dirty cloths, and the curious little creatures seemed to take their position very philosophically, for I saw none crying. As for the passionate screaming resulting from the assertive character of the English infant, it is unknown to these complacent, easy-going hill babies, who look inquiringly round and neither demand nor expect much attention. One little specimen of humanity was lying, without a rag round him, in an oblong bamboo basket fastened to his mother’s shoulders, but the child had out-grown the cradle, and his two little legs were

stuck out over one end in a comical and most uncomfortable way. His little face was quite contented, though the sun poured down on it, and he could not turn his eyes away from the glare. We have heard of the sun and air-bath cure for grown-up folk ; in time, Western mothers may try this method of rearing their children

In the course of our purchases, we found a woman with a great basket of walnuts for sale. Mrs. G. looked at them and asked the seller to crack one. We expected to see her take up a stone to break the shell, but instead, she promptly put it in her mouth and cracked it, as we should a thin-shelled Barcelona nut. When eating these walnuts afterwards they were found to be so hard that they could not be opened with nut-crackers even. What teeth and jaws that woman must have had !

The crowd had begun to disperse before we returned to a late breakfast, but though the sales were over, the bazaar was more or less thronged with busy talkers all day. They are a genial and sociable people, and this is their only way of spreading news or acquiring information.



Hill woman and girl

When the church bell rang for morning prayers, we went in with the rest, though the service was in Hindustani, and for this reason, perhaps, felt freer to look about us and observe all that went on. I was much interested. There were a few rows of forms in front, and a seat running round the walls, but the floor was bare otherwise. A raised dais at one end served for reading-desk, pulpit and font, with a small table for the altar. A harmonium, played by Mrs. G., was on the floor in front of the dais facing the congregation.

A few of the better educated sat on the forms, but most of the people squatted on the floor, boys and men on one side, women and children on the other. The babies were there too, but less happy than usual, and every now and then one would begin to cry, and the mother would increase the disturbance by trying to quiet it, until it was taken out for a short time, to reappear mollified and content. The younger children got as far to the back of the church as possible, and amused themselves by playing on the floor with a ball or toy of some kind. When it rolled to the front, they ran after it, and no one took much notice. The grown-up people were as bad, especially the women, for they fidgeted in and out all the time, and took the service by instalments

It seemed impossible for these untutored folk to sit still or remain long in one place, and every now and then they got up, went out for a few minutes, reappeared and sat down again. That this was not from any dislike to the service, was evident from the fact that, notwithstanding the constant going out, the congregation did not diminish in any way. They all came in again, and the numbers who attended this service were said to be steadily increasing. On the minister's side everything went on quietly and in order. Simple hymns were sung, and a large proportion of the people joined in the singing, the younger ones having learnt to do so in the schools. A young Lepcha, tainted with leprosy we afterwards heard, read the lessons in a clear, musical voice. A child was brought by its parents to be baptized, water for the purpose being taken from a silver mug. Then came the sermon, and though I couldn't follow it, I was much impressed by the earnestness, great command of the language, and excellent delivery of the preacher, as well as full of admiration for the gentle tolerance and absorption in his subject that enabled him to seem absolutely indifferent to the continual

movement and want of quietude among the people, which would have taxed the powers of many of the greatest preachers of the day. We felt that his system was the true one, and followed in loving sympathy with the untrained, childlike people that he had to deal with. Order, quiet and a reverent manner will come naturally in time, as the school children grow up. Knowledge and discipline will spread gradually among them, without their feeling or fearing the curbing rein.

There are already many converts to Christianity among the hill tribes—Lepchas for the most part. These people have no real religion of their own, being merely fetish-worshippers, though some have followed the teaching of the lamas to a certain extent. They fear and make offerings to evil spirits, but not to good ones, for they argue that good spirits will do them no harm, and it is only the bad that they need to propitiate. Their family affection is very strong, and when those near and dear to them are ill, they sacrifice their cattle, one after another, until the bad spirit is appeased and the patient recovers. This may take time, and it sometimes happens that everything the man possesses has been sacrificed, and then he will continue with I. O. U.'s for creatures to be offered up as soon as he can purchase them, and when the sick one is at last restored or dies, these debts of honour to the bad spirit are invariably paid to the full.

“Cleanliness is next to godliness,” and the missionaries have done no little good to their people by teaching them that members of our religion must practise personal cleanliness—and with so much success, that the Christian Lepcha community is a marked contrast in this respect to their heathen brethren.

CHAPTER VII.

KALIMPONG TO PAKYONG.

Coolie characteristics—The Kalimpong Goompa—A fertile valley—
Rissoom woods—Our syces—The Kotal—Pedong bungalow—
A subaltern's room—The Plug—A steep hill—The copper mines
—The Belle of Pakyong

NOTWITHSTANDING our regret at leaving a place where we had spent such a pleasant week, and found such good friends, there was so much interest and novelty in the prospect of the journey before us that we were full of pleasurable excitement on that memorable morning.

All our baggage was packed and ready, and by the time we had had breakfast, a group of coolies to whom we had previously advanced money to buy food for the journey were waiting for us.

What a business it was getting them off! How amusing to watch their selection of loads! They lifted and weighed, and sorted, and chattered, poked fun at each other, laughed, protested and grumbled, put down some load suggested to them with an expression of the greatest indignation and disgust, and pounced upon something much heavier with determined insistence that that was their load, the other would break their backs, and it was impossible for them to carry it. We had not paid so many freight bills for nothing, and knew pretty well just what everything weighed, so were the more amused at their performances. But it was better to humour and coax them, give them their own way and

send them off happy and triumphant. We only exerted our authority when one, more knowing than the rest, filled his long basket with odds and ends, stuck a large tin pail, intended to serve as our bath tub, on the top to make a show, and marched off. He was called back ignominiously, and made to add half a maund of oats to his little lot of etceteras. This was a man with a sense of fun, however, and he only laughed merrily at being found out so promptly.

One more coolie had to be procured at the last moment, and some delay occurred in consequence, as we seemed to



The goods depôt.

have exhausted the resources of the station in the way of unemployed labour. Our sirdar, however, found a man willing to accompany us if we gave him a few hours to arrange his family affairs and buy food, so we left the Lepcha overseer and his son, who was to act as our cook, to follow on with the extra coolie later in the day, stipulating that they were to join us at Pedong some time that night.

Including the above, the seventeen coolies on ahead, the two Nepauli syces, the Mahommedan kidmaghar, and ourselves, we made a party of twenty-five in all. The

coolies were heavily laden on this first march, carrying nearly a maund apiece, but the road to Pedong was a good one, and every day would lighten our stock of provisions. We had taken with us a small hill tent, two camp beds, folding chairs and table, and a good quantity of corn for the ponies, besides all the things we had brought from Calcutta. There was a native *pal* for those who cared to sleep under it, a full supply of food for the Mahommedan, and enough with the coolies to serve them for some days.

The sun was high in the heavens when we ordered the



Kalimpong Goompa

ponies to be saddled, and strolled along the bazaar, exchanging last words with the friends we were so sorry to part with, until we finally bid them farewell at a turn in the road opposite the goods depôt, mounted our ponies and rode off. The syces followed carrying between them a couple of cotton sunshades, iron-pointed alpenstocks, a parcel of sandwiches, some corn, two light blankets and a hand-camera

Half a mile along the road we came to the small Goompa, or monastery, surrounded by prayer-flags, and stopped to look at it. There were no lamas about,

but we found a dirty old woman in charge. A rickety staircase led to the upper storey where the altar-piece, idols and fresco paintings were. The place was dark, dirty, and uninteresting except for two deep holes in the wooden floor worn away, it was said, by the feet of a devotee who spent the best part of his life in this spot prostrate before the god, and all worshippers coming after stood in the same place, put their feet into the holes, and meditated on the greatness of the smiling Buddha, and the weary cycles of life they must pass through before attain-



A Nepali homestead

ing everlasting rest and peace in the nothingness of Nirvāna

Remounting our ponies, we cantered for some miles along the level road which fringes the fertile valley of Kalimpong.

Everything we saw filled us with admiration. The careful cultivation of the district, the neat huts of the agriculturists, the beautiful colouring of the fields, given by the bright patches of yellow mustard and ripening corn, the rich pink of the flowering millet, the bright emerald

green of the rice terraces, set off by the darker tints of the potato fields, the pasture grounds on the smooth round tops of the hills above us, and the deep shadows of distant ridges contrasting with the bright sunshine and white clouds floating softly in the clear atmosphere, made up a brilliant and beautiful picture

We passed our coolies on the road straggling here and there, and stopped the one carrying the large camera,



A Bhoota group

while we took a picture of a Nepauli farm dwelling—substantial, well-built, and very picturesque—standing on a site that showed the owner to be a man of taste and feeling beyond anything we could expect from an equally illiterate British farmer. Then we met a Lepcha youth tramping along the road with an old woman, and our attention was arrested by his fine head and perfect features—a tall, well-developed lad with the beauty of an Antinous, oval face, pure profile, Grecian traits, marred

only by the almond-shaped Mongolian eye, beautifully chiselled head poised on his shoulders in a manner that would be the despair of a sculptor. We tried hard to photograph him, but the old woman protested, fearing the evil eye, and the lad's face filled with stupid fear as he sat down on the roadside and turned away from us. Even our offer of *baksheesh* was of no avail, and seeing they were really disturbed and frightened—had never seen Europeans before, perhaps—we refrained and went on our way



Nepali traveller and coolie

Seven miles of level road brought us to a small bustee, and here we persuaded some of the people to have their photographs taken. They were shy at first, but letting them look through the focusing glass roused their curiosity, although very few of them could make anything out of it. It was impossible to attempt much posing. As long as we got them on the right plane we had to be content, lest they should change their minds and walk off altogether. The man wearing a jacket and standing to the right in the picture was one of our Bhootea coolies, introduced to give the strangers confidence. He carried the photographic

apparatus, and liked to be taken, always putting on the same amusingly self-conscious and self-satisfied smirk. One more group seated in front of a ramshackle hut and we had done.

Leaving instructions with the people to hurry on our coolies as they came through the bustee, we began the ascent leading to the forest on the hill through which our road lay.

A little further on the path bifurcated and a finger-post pointed the way to Jalpaiguri, viâ *Rissoom*, *Laba*, and *Dam-Dim*. We had heard a great deal of the beauty of the *Rissoom* woods and of the bungalow, commanding a fine view of the snows, which had been erected on the site chosen by Sir Ashley Eden. Leaving our ponies at the corner, we explored the road for some little distance, and found it beautiful indeed. On returning to the finger-post, we got into conversation with a smart Nepauli traveller who had just come up to it from the opposite direction, followed by a single coolie. He had passed through Pakyong, and gave us particulars of the fair to be held there, and which we hoped to see. He was pleased when we offered to take his photograph, but the coolie with him tried to hide behind a tree, and didn't know that we caught him round the corner.

Before going any further, we threw ourselves on the soft, thick grass and ate our sandwiches, while the ponies took their corn from a blanket spread on the ground. The syces never eat anything in the middle of the day, a morning and evening meal being the custom of the country.

Both men were intelligent and talked freely with us. They spoke Hindustani, as well as their own language and most of the hill dialects. Birman was something of a pessimist and not very encouraging when there were difficulties ahead. If the coolies were late, he thought we

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The Kotal.

need not expect them till the next morning; if one of the ponies seemed done up or out of sorts in any way, he supposed it would die. We soon learned to look on such melancholy forebodings with a light heart, and D. liked to draw him and then ridicule his ingenious prognostications of evil. The other syce we nicknamed *Ke Jani*, "who knows?" It was his invariable reply to all questions concerning the road, the weather, the possibilities, and the probabilities of the daily march. Everything was alike indifferent to him, and he never troubled himself to know. In spite of these peculiarities both were thoroughly good fellows, strong and willing, and never grumbled or gave us trouble in any way. I think, too, they enjoyed the outing on their own account.

We had now to cross the top of the hill called the Kotal, signifying crown, which is covered with a forest of very lofty trees, the fine old trunks draped in trailing moss of the most beautiful bright greens. Everything was green, mossy and luxuriant, and with autumn tints of rich browns and brilliant reds made up a fairy-like forest worthy of a Midsummer Night's Dream. We took a photograph of the entrance to it, with "Ginger," which I rode that day, and *Ke Jani* in the foreground. It was darker and more thickly wooded higher up, where we met some lamas on their way to Kalimpong, and being at an elevation of 6000 feet, I was glad to put on the little cape I carried strapped to my saddle ready for such changes of temperature.

It was nearly sundown when we reached Pedong bungalow, built at an elevation of 4760 feet, and therefore a good deal colder than Kalimpong.

A small detachment of troops was stationed there, and we found the bungalow occupied by three officers of the regiment. They gave us a warm welcome and invited us to their mess dinner, to which they chanced to have no less than four other guests. The young lieutenant gave up his

room to us, and a bright fire was soon blazing on the hearth. We had feared our coolies would be late as they had no sirdar with them, and many of them lived along the road we had come, and would be sure to linger about their homes. They dropped in one by one, but the man most wanted came last, and we had to dine in our riding things, which was tiresome and fatiguing.

A party of nine taxed the resources of the dāk bungalow table-ware to the utmost, and a deficiency in tumblers had to be made up with cups, but Captain M. whispered to me he "didn't mind about the crockery if only the joint would go round." Nothing could exceed his satisfaction when it did so, successfully. Dinner was followed by a



Pedong bungalow

merry evening, with songs sung to a banjo accompaniment, and others dispensing with anything beyond a lively chorus. But at last we were too tired to sit up any longer.

A sound sleep, under more blankets than we had needed for many a long day, refreshed and rested us. On waking the next morning a first glance round made me think I was still dreaming. The small room, with white-washed walls and wooden partitions, was ornamented with comic pictures from illustrated papers, arrangements of miniature flags, boxing gloves, a few photographs, a tennis bat, two guns, and sundry other evidences of a young subaltern's love of sport and outdoor exercise. This with all the makeshift arrangements of camp life and little luggage,

but decidedly more comfortable than living in tents on these hills.

We had told our sirdar to be on the look-out for an extra pony for us, as we wished to buy one, and he now came to tell us that a Bhootea had brought one up to the bungalow for inspection. We were much amused at the thought of riding the strange, unkempt-looking animal, with long, shaggy coat and native saddlery: but when the owner began to describe his pony's virtues, showed his shoeless but hard hoofs, and jumping on his back, careered over the hillside, he finally induced my husband to try him, with the result that he was purchased, after some bargaining, for the modest sum of eighty rupees. D. called him "The Plug," as being a stop-gap in case of need. He was stronger than "Ginger," or the "Chota-wallah," so D. monopolized him and left the two former to me.

Clarke's clippers had been included in our stable kit, and with the two syces at work our new purchase was speedily shorn of his long coat, and well washed and groomed. When brought round a few hours later, with English saddle and bridle, the transformation was so complete that we might have defied his late owner to recognize him. He soon became a favourite, for though a true country-bred, with *pugdandy*¹ proclivities as we afterwards found, he proved a most useful animal, as little concerned about the character of the road he was expected to traverse as his former master would have been.

The main road to Pakyong was round by Rhenok, but there was a short cut from Pedong, and as we intended to take the Rhenok road on our next march, we chose the short cut or back way for our journey on this occasion.

For the first two or three miles the road wound across the tops of well-wooded hills and had a somewhat

¹ A short cut up the hill.

deserted or little-used look. By-and-by we found ourselves on the summit of a hill overhanging the Rishett, a small river which at this point marks the boundary between British and Independent Sikkim. This hillside was the most perpendicular and precipitous of any that we had to descend in our travels, though the road itself zigzagging down the steep was not nearly as bad as some we had to negotiate later on. The wonder was to stand on the top and look down on the tiny silver thread of water flowing a thousand feet below. We soon found that this was an occasion when ponies were at a discount. It was easier to walk with the help of an alpenstock, though the sloping road tired our ankles a good deal, and every step jarred us in a most fatiguing way.

On reaching the bottom we had to cross a newly-made but very *cutch* bamboo bridge. I was on "Ginger" again, by this time thoroughly tired out, and rode him across, led by the syce. The loose bits of bamboo danced about as the slight structure swayed with our united weight. I was afterwards told that no wise traveller attempted to cross these bridges mounted. It was better to see one's pony over, and, if he crossed safely, follow quietly on foot.

A pleasant canter along rice fields and cultivated ground brought us to another small river called the Rarhi, which joins the Rishett a little further down and then flows on into the Teesta.

The opposite side was beautifully wooded, with a fine indiarubber tree just behind some huts facing the bamboo bridge. The clear rushing water, white rounded stones on either side shining in the sunlight, the many-shaded greens of the forest trees, with a glimpse of the rough path winding up a slope between them, made a charming vista. We lingered to eat our lunch there, but resisted the temptation to encamp in such a lovely place. On crossing the river

we followed a narrow and somewhat difficult path among the trees for some way and then got into the main road leading to the copper mines. Here the scene changed. Everything looked barren, dusty and uninteresting, and the only break in a long, tiring pull up the hill was when we passed a neat house on the side of the road belonging to the Bengali manager of the mines, who stopped us as we went by, and begged us to rest in his garden and



The Rarhi Chu

refresh ourselves with oranges. This kindly hospitality to passing strangers is very pleasant, and though it was too late for us to linger then, we chatted with the Babu for a little. When we left he insisted on giving us a live chicken put up in a basket and a large bottle of fresh milk.

We had still three miles to go, and it was dusk by the time we reached Pakyong. Everyone in the place had gone to bed, and we had some difficulty in finding the

rest-house. A chowkidar turned up at last, and from him we learned that there was no regular dāk bungalow, but a few scattered buildings formerly occupied by troops, and now placed at the disposal of travellers. They were too far from each other to occupy more than one.

After a tour of inspection we decided on the old mess-house, as it contained two small bedsteads and all necessary furniture, as well as a grand fireplace large enough to roast an ox. The chowkidar brought in some huge logs, four or five feet long, and piled them up the chimney, with the result that we soon had a regular bon-fire with a large kettle hanging over it. Warmth was a great thing, but we began to feel very hungry, and there was no sign of the coolies. When nearly starving we called in the chowkidar and Birman to consult about food. There was nothing to be had that we could eat except rice, and at last we arranged that they should cook us some in the milk the Babu had given us—the chicken was beyond both them and us.

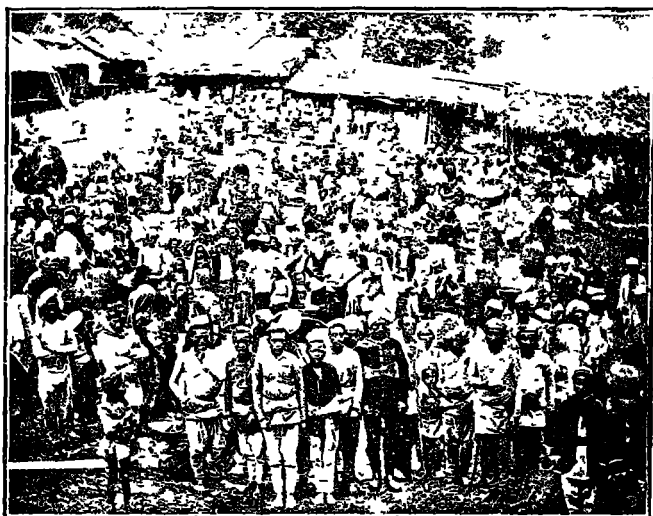
It was 9 o'clock when they reappeared, bringing a dish of boiled rice and a brass vessel emitting a savoury odour very welcome to hungry folk. The chowkidar shyly offered the latter to us. He didn't know whether we could eat it, but it was only *terkarz*.¹ We thanked him cordially and found it tasted as good as it looked—potato mixed with succulent greens of some kind and flavoured with herbs and curry spices. I never tasted anything better. We made an excellent meal and gave a share to the hungry dogs. As there was still no sign of our coolies, and we had no bedding, the friendly chowkidar got us a new *resaz* from a native merchant for a mattress and a bundle of new towels for pillows, and with these we lay down in our riding clothes and went to sleep.

It was 3 a.m. when servants and coolies appeared. The

¹ Vegetable curry

hill men had been fêted by friends at the copper mines, and our kidmaghar was afraid to come on alone. We were too sleepy to go into the matter, but got our bedding from them and felt glad to know that there was some prospect of breakfast in the morning.

When thoroughly rested, and after a satisfactory first trial of our Lepcha cook's skill, we went out to see the *mela*.



The Pakyong Mela

The bazaar, or market-place, was a tolerably level square surrounded by little huts and shops. The whole place teemed with people—some two or three hundred. The majority were Nepaulis, the rest Sikhim Bhooteas. The scene was bright, animated and picturesque. Talkative, sociable people, full of fun and laughter, they seemed to have met together for the pleasures of gossip rather than for barter. Women mixed freely with the men, and

it was easy to see that the art of flirtation was not altogether unknown to them.

One fine-looking woman of evident consequence attracted our notice by the attention paid to her by a tall, well-dressed Bhootea. She seemed ugly enough with her face smeared with pig's blood, which most unsavoury



The Belle of Pakyong

cosmetic hill women use to preserve their complexion. Her admirer laughed and joked, and was evidently doing his best to please her. They looked often in our direction, and at last the man came up and told us the Kazi's wife—for thus she proved to be—would like us to take her photograph if we would kindly do so. We consented and called up the woman, but when preparing to place her she

promptly demurred to being photographed in that guise. She would dress properly, and go to the bungalow at any time we liked. She had been to Darjeeling, had been photographed before, and had often been in a *kala-jugga* with the sahib—a speech which moved us to heartier laughter than she could understand.

At 3 o'clock in the afternoon she appeared, radiant in gorgeous apparel and numerous ornaments. The horrid compound of blood and fat had been washed off her face, showing a rich brown sunburnt complexion and good features. Altogether a fine-looking woman, strong, healthy, and well-developed. Her expression was somewhat bold, and overweening vanity showed in every word and movement. She had brought with her two young, heavy and stupid-looking girls, clad in the dirtiest of dirty white garments. To our intense amusement she insisted on being photographed with them. They were to be a foil to her beauty! Her own dress was really handsome, of bright blues and reds with white cuffs and neckerchief. It was very amusing to see her settling herself into position while she passed her hands over her face and told D. she did not wish to be made to look dark like the common people—her face must be white and nice. When we complimented her on her looks she smiled happily, but said we should have seen her when she was younger, for indeed she was beautiful then. She could hardly have been more than twenty-five years of age. Her husband was away at Tumlong, but we could see, and indeed heard afterwards, that this proud beauty was the chief ruler in Pakyong and its neighbourhood.

CHAPTER VIII.

PAKYONG TO SEDONGCHEN.

An early start—Rhenok Bazaar—Up hill and down dale—A broken bridge—Rongli Chu Rest-house—A midnight visitor—Marital jealousy—A mountain torrent—A waterfall—Delicious water—Sikhim roads—A stiff climb—Chhumbi's birthplace—Sedongchen—A detachment of soldiers—Our chota-hazree party.

THE halt at Pakyong enabled us to make an early start the next day. We had a seventeen-mile march before us, and were likely to be a long time on the road. The coolies were got off by 9 o'clock—an hour or more in advance of us. It was impossible to do more than this, as they required a good morning meal, which had to be prepared and eaten before they started. D. and I followed leisurely for the first few miles until we reached the Copper Mines, where Toomhang, our sirdar, was waiting, according to our instructions, to report that he had seen all the men safely past this alluring spot. Cantering along the level bit of road by the banks of the Rarhi Chu, we crossed the river higher up than on our previous march, over a substantial but unpicturesque bridge of the Public Works Department type, and so turned into the main road to Rhenok Bazaar. Nothing special attracted us on the way, and we hurried on, as we had arranged that a man should meet us there with our dāk forwarded from Pedong.

It was midday when we arrived at this the last native bazaar that we were likely to find for many marches, and

the man we expected was there waiting for us with quite a large bundle of letters, papers, and small parcels. Getting off our ponies, we sat down on the ledge of a grain shop, in a shady corner of the bazaar, to read our home letters, and were soon surrounded by an admiring and odoriferous crowd of hill men and women. Their smiling, pleasant faces made one ignore the fact that their clothes were put on never to be taken off until they dropped in pieces by the wayside, when a new garment would hide the last tatters, to be in its turn worn to the same condition as its predecessor.

Among the parcels forwarded to us we happened to have some interesting photographs—taken in Burmah—intended for the Calcutta Photographic Exhibition, and I showed these to the people with great success. The ordinary low-class native of the plains sees nothing in a photograph and will hold it upside down, and gaze at it



A bit of the road

with an expression of absolute vacancy, whereas these hill folks were soon in fits of laughter at pictures representing the process of tattooing. They showed us the marks on their own arms, and then burst into rippling peals at the photograph of a white man being operated on in the same way. Their light-hearted merriment was so contagious that we found ourselves laughing at and with them with all our heart. The syces had loosened the ponies' saddle-girths and given them their midday meal, but left their charges to see the pictures and join in the fun. "Ginger" thought he would do likewise, and gave vent to his feelings in a sudden roll over, regardless of danger

to my saddle, which slipped to one side luckily and escaped much injury.

This little contretemps reminded us that we must not stay too long. Finding that our coolies were all in and busy purchasing food, we hurried them off and prepared for a three-mile climb to the top of Rhenok hill. Very steep and fatiguing we found it, for the sun was still hot, but at last we reached the rounded summit of the hill at 5260 ft. elevation, had some tea there, and enjoyed the fresh breeze and cool air. We had still four miles to go



and a descent of over 2600 ft. before reaching our destination. The road became more and more beautiful, forest trees, mossy glades, with a pretty rippling stream sparkling in the golden rays of the setting sun; then long shadows, gathering darkness, and careful picking of steps in the leaf-strewn path. We had been walking for some way and learned something of the meaning of coolie driving. The men were very tired after their long march; one in front of us stopped every few yards, put the thick bamboo stick each man carried with him under his load,

and gave expression to his fatigue in a long shrill whistle, which D. imitated with ludicrous success. Fortunately the air was warm in the sheltered forest at this low elevation, and we could loiter about without feeling cold.

The night was very dark, and we sent Toomhang back with one of the lanterns to bring on the lagging coolies, while Teptook, the cook, carried the other in front of us. I had remounted as it got darker, having more confidence in the pony's surefootedness than in my own. The sound of rushing water, as we approached the river, seemed unnaturally loud in the still night, and though hardly 8 o'clock it was so dark that our hurricane lamp couldn't penetrate the gloom for more than a few yards, and showed us little but the inequalities of the road.

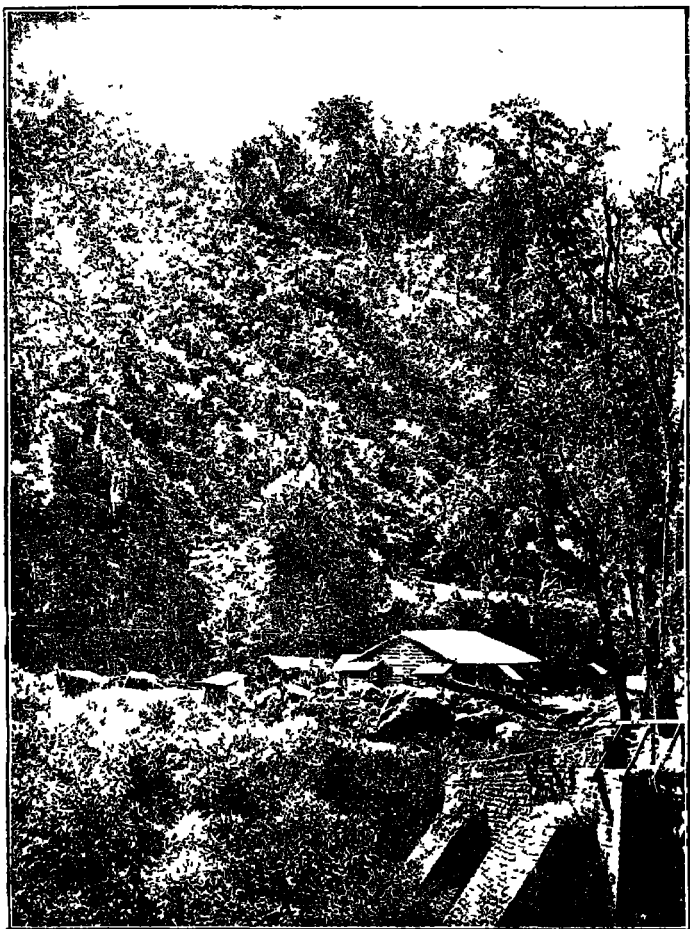
A little further and we suddenly came to a dead stop, as the road abruptly ended in a wall of bramble bush, placed there with the evident intention of blocking the way. We perforce retraced our steps, searching for a way in the darkness. A newly-trodden, but incredibly rough path was discovered after some delay. We followed it with no little difficulty, and then found to our dismay that it led to a foaming cascade with a narrow, barrierless bridge crossing just in front of it. The noise was deafening; we had to shout to make ourselves heard. It seemed so impossible that we should be expected to cross in such a place that in spite of Birman's and Teptook's assurance that there could be no other path, we laboriously retraced our steps to where the road had ended in jungle, and searched again. Further exploring showed that the old bridge had given way, and that the one in such close proximity to the cascade was a temporary structure that had to be crossed somehow. We accomplished the task in fear and trembling, and found the bungalow a few hundred yards further on.

The faint glimmer of our lantern showed a substantial

building made with the usual horizontal planked walls and corrugated iron roof, but inside it was the dirtiest and least inviting we had come across. With some little trouble our men succeeded in finding the chowkidar, and brought him before us, a poor miserable wretch shaking with fever and ague. A comical sight withal, for his head was bound up with a gorgeous woollen comforter, the ends of which, fastened on top, stuck up like the fringe of a tassel. We could hardly keep from laughing. There was no one else, and it was impossible to scold this helpless victim of malaria for the condition in which we found the rest-house. We made him show us the crockery and lamp cupboards, and leave the keys with Teptook, and then sent him back to his hut.

We were only 2000 feet above the sea-level, the Rongli Chu Rest-house, though prettily situated, was so shut in by trees and hills that the air was specially warm and mild even for this comparatively low elevation. A large covered verandah seemed the best place for supper, and when D. had seen what arrangements the syces had made for the ponies, and I had selected a bed-room, we sat down to await the preparation of our evening meal. The illumination we had made in the verandah must have been a welcome beacon to the coolies; they dropped in slowly one by one, depositing their loads on the floor with the usual whistle of relief, opened such bundles as we required, and then vanished until the morning. We turned in about 11 p.m., and fell asleep to the tune of rushing waters.

The Rongli Chu signifies the river of the Rongs, and this mighty torrent comes tearing down from the heights above. Every little trickling stream from the surrounding hills seems drawn towards it by some resistless attraction. and, breaking out suddenly, rushes helter-skelter onwards until it tumbles into the bed of the river in the form



Rongli Chu Bungalow.

of a miniature cascade, foaming and frothing as it falls.

Once or twice in the night the dogs roused us with sudden angry barks, and we heard a scuttling in the verandah which I supposed to be a jackal or other wild animal. We were too sleepy to trouble ourselves, however, and our faithful guardians were quiet as soon as the pitter-patter ceased or was lost in the roar of the river. We found the robber in the morning in the form of a large ungainly pariah dog. His midnight meal had consisted of three parts of a loaf of bread, half a tin of butter, and the remainder of a joint of hunter's beef we had brought with us. By so much were we the poorer for his visit, but there stood the culprit, wagging his tail appreciatively, and meditating another raid on our provisions.

We had just finished breakfast when a group of Sikkim Bhootas, travelling towards Kalimpong, passed by the rest-house. One, who was gaily dressed, and bedecked with many ornaments, was evidently a young bride. D. persuaded them to stop and be photographed. We took them altogether in a group. Not satisfied with this, D suggested taking a special picture of the young beauty. We had just arranged to do so, when the husband became suddenly irate, got up, said something to the others, and marched quickly away, followed by the whole party.

When all the coolies, but the one carrying our large camera and tiffin basket, had started, we took a photograph of the bungalow from the back, as it was impossible to get far enough away to take a front view. The chowkidar appeared before we went with the visitors' book, but was only just able to stand. We gave him half a bottle of quinine,—the very sight of which raised his spirits considerably,—and advised him not to spend another rainy season in the malarious valley of the Rongli Chu. We had taken a precautionary dose of quinine our-

selves, and felt thankful that we were not obliged to stay more than one night in an atmosphere reeking with rank vegetation, lovely as the place was.

We had not gone far before we stopped to take the view of the river given here. A group of natives standing on some rocky boulders, seemed a fitting accompaniment of the scene. D. climbed down from the road above, set up the camera on broken rocks, and so got the hill men in the fore-ground. See what pigmies they look beside the huge



Sikkim Bhootas

boulders lying in the river, which rushed past them and us with a noise so great we could hardly hear ourselves speak.

There is always something alarming in these Himalayan torrents. Imagine such a river as the Findhorn, in Scotland, with its rocky bed and precipitous banks copied on a gigantic scale and flowing amidst huge mountains. Instead of the gentle frothing of the Scotch river as it passes over smooth stones lying between its deep salmon pools, picture a rushing torrent, tearing tumultuously over giant boulders at an angle which makes the river look like a continuous cascade of falling water. To fall in would mean being dashed to pieces in a few seconds. The



The Rongli Chu

quantity of water varies from so many causes, that a single night is sometimes enough to destroy a temporary bridge, or make a ford impassable. Travellers may have to wait on the banks until the river subsides again, or a new bridge can be constructed.

The first five miles beyond the Rongli Chu Bungalow is the most beautiful part of the journey to Gnatong. The road went up and down in very steep and sharp curves, all along by the richly wooded banks of the river. Branches of great trees met overhead, and intertwined so closely that they shut out the brightness of daylight, making a cool twilight shade. Now a dazzling flood of sunshine lighted up the luxuriant vegetation, turning autumn leaves to rosy red, and ferns to golden hues. The shadows of the undergrowth deepened by contrast, as we penetrated still further into the forest, and the path wound in and out as in the mazes of a labyrinth, with a gentle and continuous rise the whole way. Every step gave us a new and beautiful scene. Now we thought we had left the bed of the rushing, turbulent stream, now we returned to it on the edge of an almost perpendicular precipice with the water hundreds of feet below us, and again we were alongside of it.

We had heard of a wonderful waterfall in the Rongli Chu, some two miles beyond the bungalow, formed by a sudden fall in the bed of the river itself. We were fortunate enough to find it with the help of one of our coolies. A small path, overgrown with jungle, and quite hidden from view, led down the side of the *khud* itself,—neither easy nor very safe. It seemed a foolhardy thing to climb down this *cutch* path, roughly trodden over roots of trees and shrubs, even to see the renowned waterfall, which was not visible from the main road. We were well rewarded, however, when halfway down the precipice we got a view of this most remarkable cataract. The river rushed foaming down a sudden straight drop of perhaps 150 feet far

into the deep pool below us, making a great splashing foam which looked like steam rising from a boiling cauldron, as we gazed down upon it. The camera was dragged down the *khud*, and set up at imminent risk. We secured some sort of picture of the falling water, but one that gave a very inadequate idea of the wild scene.

For three or four miles beyond the Rongli Chu Rest-house the path wound along the river bank and then turned away, becoming less thickly wooded as we left the foaming torrent behind us.



We crossed a small tributary, a miniature copy of the greater river, then toiled up a sudden steep incline, and skirted a rocky barren hill exposed to the rays of the midday sun. It was hot and trying after the cool shade of the forest, and we began to suffer from thirst, but to our surprise could find no traces of even a tiny trickling stream. By-and-by we met a native carrying two *gunlahs*¹ of water suspended from a bamboo yoke. From him we learned that there was a spring about half a mile further on. We came upon it quite suddenly; a bright jet of pure, sparkling water dancing in the sunlight, spurting from a rock by the wayside

and trickling across the path as it overflowed the natural basin it had worn away for itself.

It was not thirst alone that made this water delicious. We found it so nearly always in the higher altitudes. Champagne is hardly more exhilarating than some of these sparkling Himalayan springs. Bacchus himself might have found such water a worthy exchange for the

¹ Forthen vessels

juice of the most luscious grapes. We sat in the shade of a rhododendron; ate, drank, and were merry as any banquet could make us.

The place where we had been resting was called Lingtamtho, and from this point of our journey the character of the road changed materially.

We had now arrived at the foot of the nine miles climb to the summit of Lingtu, in the course of which the path rises from 4630 ft. to 12,617 ft. We had only three and a half miles to accomplish that day to reach the Sedongchen Rest-house, and hoped to get in before sundown.

Of the road itself it is difficult to convey any very correct idea to those who have never been in the Himalayas. The military road, on which we travelled as far as the Jeylap Pass, averages four feet wide, more or less, and was constructed by our soldiers, after the affray with Tibet, on the line of the native footpath. It is remarkably steep and rough in parts. How the hill ponies carried us over it was a never-ceasing wonder. Mountain streams cross it constantly, and it is said to be dreadful in the rainy season. The ponies do not mind the streams, but stop to drink at all sorts of impossible places. The path winds round the hills, sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other, and goes up in a zig-zag. Except on the summit of a mountain, there is generally a steep precipice on one side, and no rail of any sort to protect one from falling; even in the valleys one is generally on the edge of a roaring torrent. In the bracing atmosphere and healthy open-air life, we took these roads as a matter of course somehow, and it was only occasionally I thought of what would happen if the pony slipped, and called Birman to lead my animal round some particularly sharp turn to the right, which necessitated my feet being literally over a precipice for a few seconds. It was at

these moments that I understood there might sometimes be advantages in riding *à la cavalier*.

The first two miles of the ascent were very steep and trying. We now felt the effects of the rarified mountain air, which inconveniences ponies no less than human beings. They had a curious way of going up hill, but we let them do as they liked. The bleak, chilly air, which now blew over us direct from the snowy range, invigorated the animals, and every now and then "Ginger" set off at a canter up the hill, stopping to get breath every thirty or forty yards and then off again. My progress thus

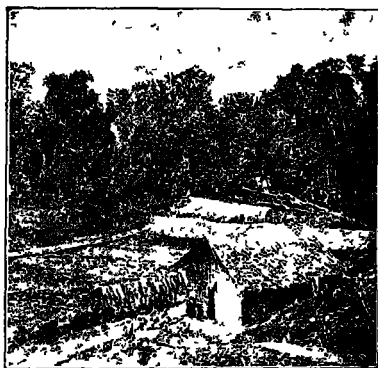


Pademchen.

became a series of short dashes and then a dead stop to pant and gasp for breath. "The Plug," on the contrary, climbed slowly and steadily, stopping occasionally for breath, and saving himself in every way as though for a long journey. But he was an old stager, and had learned the customs of the Bhootea folk.

By-and-by we came to an open tract of country with a few Bhootea huts on it. This was Pademchen, just below Sedongchen, the most level piece of land we met for many a day. It was used as a camping ground for troops marching up and down to Gnatong, and was the only place on the road where a dozen or more small tents

could be pitched together. It had a special interest for us, since we knew that one of the huts by the side of the road was Chhumbi's birthplace. Birman pointed it out, and I called to the inmates as we stopped in front of it. An old woman and two younger ones came out, and a man appeared from behind the hut ; but I pointed in vain to my dog till the syce interpreted. It was funny to see the sudden surprise and pleasure spread over their features when they realized that the puppy they had sold to a *sahib*,



Chhumbi's birthplace

a year before, had grown into such an aristocratic-looking dog, as he sat before them with supreme indifference, while they knelt round, calling him with many affectionate expressions, trying in vain to get some response.

Another quarter of a mile's climb and we were at the Sedongchen Rest-house—a small, roughly built, and unnecessarily well-raised structure with two rooms in it. We were very cold by this time, so our first thought was for a fire and some hot tea. There was no trouble about the coolies on this occasion. We found from experience that when going to a cold place they were always in good

time, and only dawdled when the atmosphere was mild. They were all in by the time we had had our tea, and were soon busy preparing their evening meal, gossiping as usual. D. took a photograph of one party, in which the syce, Birman, was an interested listener.

Warned by Mr. S. before we left Kalimpong, we knew which stove was in good order and which smoked. We made the apartment containing the former our sitting-room, but soon found that in spite of a hot stove the bitterly cold wind whistled through the spaces between the boards till we were half frozen. The cold coming from under the raised wooden floor was still worse. We set to work to make ourselves comfortable by spreading the waterproof sheets used to wrap our bedding in on the floor, and stuffed the largest chinks in the walls with newspapers.

We were just comfortably settled when we heard of the arrival of the detachment of soldiers from the "Queen's" Regiment, come to relieve the "King's" at Gnatong. They were encamped on the level ground below, so D. went down to pay them a visit, and invited the two officers to dine with us that evening. They did so, but retired early, as they were to be off at some unearthly hour in the morning.

On going to bed we found it so cold that for a long time sleep was impossible. We were lying on one of the usual *newah* bedsteads—a wooden frame with strong tapes laced across. There was no mattress of any kind, and though I had put a padded *resai* underneath, the wind blew right through it.

I seemed to have just fallen into a doze when I became conscious that someone was running up the hill—every sound being distinctly heard through the thin walls of our room in that clear atmosphere. The runner was evidently coming nearer. In another minute he clattered noisily up

the wooden steps, rapped loudly at the door, and called out that he was the *dakwallah*¹ D half woke, muttered something and turned over again. When I asked him what was to be done, he answered sleepily, "Open the door, and take in the letters" I saw I was in for it, and indeed I was lying nearest. Throwing a rug round me, I got up, opened the door a few inches, and put out my hand for the letters. Things were not done in this way I found First, a bag full of loaves which we had ordered to be sent on after us had come by the post, and when I



had pulled this inside, I found that the postman carried an open letter bag, and that I must get a light and look through the letters myself. Here was a nice occupation to be performed on the steps at 3 o'clock in the morning, and my teeth were chattering by the time I had done. I vowed D. should always sleep nearest the door in future.

We were just about to have breakfast the next day, when two soldiers appeared, looking very fagged out, and made inquiries as to whether there was any food to be had. Seeing only two, my husband promptly said:

¹ Postman

"Come along, we will give you some breakfast" They hesitated, and we found they were only the foragers of some dozen or more at the camping ground. Owing to difficulties of transport, they had had to return for things left at Rongli Chu, and with the extra appetite of the hills had probably disposed of their rations before time. Our commissariat arrangements were hardly equal to this unexpected demand, but we had just received a dozen loaves of bread, and as good luck had it, we had plenty of butter, tinned milk and coffee. We cut half-a-dozen of the loaves into huge slices, and made coffee in a large *degchue*¹ with milk and sugar added, and as the men trooped up, we filled their mugs as often as they liked with the hot coffee, but had to limit their appetites to two slices of bread and butter each. It was a *chota-haziree*² for them anyhow, and they evidently appreciated it.

Not wishing to hurry on to the fort before the new men sent up had had time to settle down, besides preferring to have the road clear for our journey, we decided to halt for a day where we were. Then, too, the cold was quite as much as we could stand all at once: we wanted to become acclimatized gradually. In the daytime the clear bracing air was invigorating, and deliciously pure after the malaria-laden atmosphere of the valleys, but the nights were dreadfully cold. We wrote letters, rearranged our bundles, and took photographs. A Bhootia woman brought a woollen rug up for our inspection, which we were only too delighted to buy as a mattress. It was made of unbleached white wool, was very soft but heavy, and about half an inch thick. We found it a great comfort to us all through our travels, and now use it as a floor rug. It seems indestructible.

One coolie, taken on at Pedong as an extra man, wished to return to his home, so we secured a Nepauli, who had

¹ Saucepan

² Small breakfast



View above Sedongchen.

just come from a journey on the very road we were taking, to fill his place. He proved a most useful member of our little party. The coolies spent the day chatting lazily, or searching the hills for nettle leaves to make soup with. We tried some too and found it quite eatable. The Lepchas are deeply versed in knowledge of the edible value or otherwise of every root, herb, and berry that grows in their country—knowledge handed down by the experience of past generations, but doomed to die out before the regular supply of staple articles of diet attendant on intercourse with us. Toomhang was a renowned botanist, and his son Teptook flavoured our dishes with leaves gathered by the roadside.

We left Sedongchen early the next morning and climbed up Lingtu—six miles of hard work; this being by far the heaviest march between Kalimpong and Gnatong. The military road is level, solid, and good, in comparison with native roads, but here it is very stony and steep, and the high altitude makes both man and beast stop constantly for breath.

CHAPTER IX.

GNATONG.

Gnatong Fort—The dāk bungalow—The effects of rarified atmosphere—The mess house—Headache and mountain sickness—Bromhead Point—Kinchenjunga—The use of dogs.

VEGETATION became scantier as we ascended into the rarified atmosphere of Lingtu, and it was with much thankfulness that we reached a natural halting place in the continuous climb, doubly suggestive of the advantages of a brief rest, as we met a party of sepoy and some Tibetans travelling down the hill, disporting themselves at their ease. They got up as we approached and went on their way, while we, following their example, halted awhile.

When starting again, we soon found ourselves enveloped by the mists in which Lingtu is said to be almost perpetually shrouded. The road became more and more difficult, sometimes almost perpendicular, at others crossing a ridge leading from some lower peak on to the main summit of this huge mountain. We could only see a few yards ahead, and there were many sudden, dangerous turns in the road. We kept close together. The wisdom of so doing was more forcibly realized by both of us when we heard later of a poor soldier who, only the previous day, had got separated from his comrades in the fog, lost his way, and wandered about the mountains the whole night. He just managed to reach the Fort when daylight



The Lingtu Road

dawned ; but was down with pneumonia when we were there, and died soon afterwards.

Birman and Ke Janı both looked pale and troubled as we climbed the hill, and were so evidently depressed and unhappy that D. asked them what the trouble was. In low tones, as though fearful of being overheard, they told us of the *bhoot*, or evil spirit, which lived in this hill and "devoured unwary shepherds when they wandered about by themselves. Now that so many *gora lok*¹ had come to Gnatong he had gone higher up towards the Jeylap, as he didn't like to meet many men. The *bhoot's* name was Toksongba ; he was a big hairy spirit, forty feet long, and walked on hands and feet. He was very terrible and very voracious," said the syces solemnly. It was pretty evident that a hill bear had been magnified into the proportions of this Toksongba ; but when D. tried to reassure the men by telling them this, they only turned paler and kept silence, horrified lest the *bhoot* should have overheard this sacrilegious speech.

It was very cold as we neared the top of Lingtu, and the view was obscured by clouds and mist which chilled us still more. It was with a sense of no little triumph that we at last found ourselves on the summit, by the remains of the fort and wall built by the Tibetans to stop our approach when we fought against them. Here we sat and had tiffin, sheltered by the ruins from a bitterly cold wind, and thoroughly enjoyed a hot stew from our Norwegian stove box at an altitude of 12,617 feet. It was too cold to linger long when we had finished our lunch.

The road now made a sharp descent on the other side of the cone for half a mile or so, and then we came to a long level called Shalambi, where our ponies galloped along merrily. We had left clouds and mist behind us, but passed through one sharp shower of fine hailstones,

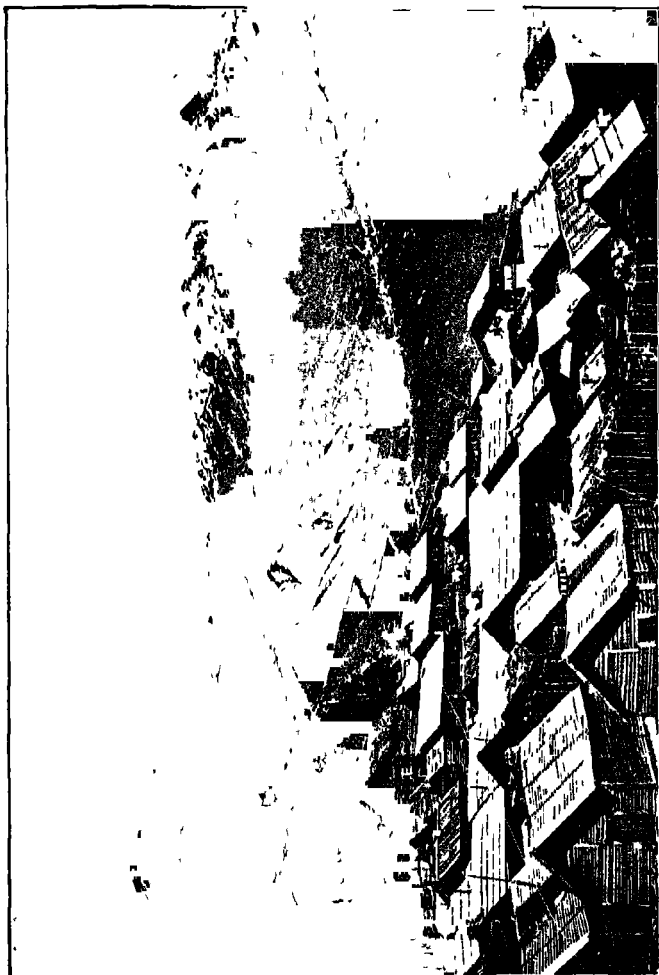
¹ Soldiers

which came rattling down about us and necessitated the use of the waterproof capes we carried strapped to our saddles. It was soon over; and as we followed the winding but good road leading to Gnatong, we had grand views of the distant snowy range, which now seemed so much nearer.

Another few minutes and a turn in the road brought us in full view of the quaint little stockade, where a hundred British soldiers stood sentry to guard our frontier, and keep a check on the far-reaching power of the Great Lama of Llassa. It looked like a toy fort rather than a stronghold of British power. A few huts on the hillside were occupied by Bhooteas employed as woodcutters, and numbers of little children played in front of them heedless of the biting cold.

Riding a little in advance of D., I made straight for the Lingtu Gate, but pulled up hastily when the sentry suddenly cried "Halt," levelled his bayonet, and thrust it within a few inches of "Ginger's" nose. I don't know whether my pony or I was the more startled. A brief parley, with assurances of our peaceful intentions, followed; but it was some minutes before the order for our admittance was passed and the bayonet respectfully lowered. Even then I went by it cautiously.

The Gnatong Fort, without doubt, was the highest garrisoned land in the world. It was interesting not only for this reason, but because of the wildness of the scenery, the isolation of the position, and the purpose for which this company of a hundred British soldiers held the heights on the borders of the mysterious land of Tibet. It lay in a hollow, at an altitude of 12,030 feet, rather lower than the summit of Lingtu, and consisted of rows of roughly-made wood and stone huts and sheds with the inevitable corrugated iron roofs, surrounded by a high wooden palisade. It was protected on one side by the



The Fort, Gnatong.

Gnatong River, a small mountain stream in a rocky bed; and on the other by a miniature lake or pond, half frozen over when we were there, and famous for skating on in the cold months. The Fort was on a slope and very rocky. The buildings were in more or less parallel lines. It was quite a climb from one row to the next, though only a few yards. Every now and then one had to stumble up a dozen or more rough stone steps, so simply hewn out of the masses of rock imbedded in the earth that it might be the work of prehistoric man. Nevertheless the narrow spaces between the lines were dignified with such names as "Maud Grove," "Charing Cross," and "Hyde Park Corner." The last company of British troops stationed there was withdrawn in 1897, and their place taken for a time by native police.

Being on the direct road to the Jeylap Pass, the Fort contained a dāk bungalow for the use of civil officers and travellers. It was to this that we were conducted—a two-roomed structure with bath-rooms attached and papered walls; this latter refinement of luxury in such surroundings being a witness to an officer's attention to the comfort of his wife who spent several months with him there in the early days of the Gnatong Fort. Two large stoves, similar in character to the one we had had so much comfort out of in the Sedongchen rest-house, reassured us as we entered rooms that struck deadly cold as we went in. The coolies had all arrived and soon piled our belongings in the outer room: the chowkidar brought wood for the stoves and made large fires, while our servants prepared the hot tea we were so much in need of.

There was very little furniture in the bungalow when we arrived, but as we unpacked our things, sundry articles were sent down to us by the officers with thoughtful kindness. A dressing-table, looking-glass, a table-cloth

and an easy-chair made us quite comfortable. Then came an invitation to the officers' mess while we were at Gnatong. The messenger told us the dinner hour, and said he would come for us with a light to show us the way.

While dressing for dinner we realized that in spite of good fires it was extremely cold, but attributed the symptoms of breathlessness we felt from time to time to fatigue rather than to the rarified atmosphere. We were quite ready when the dinner gong sounded and our guide arrived. I had with me a long fur-lined cloak, and D. a thick ulster, so we donned these garments and wrapped woollen shawls round our heads. We had only about fifty yards to go, but had to climb up some very rough and difficult stone steps. I was enjoying the novelty of the surroundings when suddenly my breath seemed to stop, and there I stood clinging to a rail, fighting and gasping for breath in the most dreadful manner. It was an agonizing experience. Major N. came out and got me into the comparatively warm atmosphere of the mess room, where I soon recovered with no after ill effects. Indeed, I never had such a severe attack again, even at higher elevations, but then I was never exposed to the open air so long after sundown.

The officer in command, two young subalterns, and the doctor, who was already known to us, were our hosts, and one and all made us very welcome.

The mess house was a room about fourteen feet square, with an ante-room used as a pantry, the kitchen being alongside. The plank walls were papered all over with pictures from illustrated newspapers in the style of a nursery picture screen. They were in various tones of yellow, clearly showing that they had been pasted on the walls at different times as papers had been received at Gnatong. No one knew who had originated the idea,

but it was undoubtedly a good one, as the layers of paper kept out a great deal of the bitter cold of the night air. The Major declared that such a wall paper was *infra dig.* for an officer's mess room, but had never given definite orders for its removal. A stove on one side of the room was only considered as supplementary to the huge open



A halting place (see p 92)

fireplace, where logs of rhododendron wood blazed brightly. And yet though one might be half roasted with the heat, the other half was pretty sure to be icy cold.

At dinner the delicious mountain water was the only drink, the difficulty and expense of carrying wine or spirits up the rough roads being so great that water was

invariably drunk at table, alcoholic beverages being kept for special occasions. Ginger-wine was used as a liqueur after dinner, and was excellent in those cold regions. We had guessed this, and carried a few bottles with us. Whisky was mostly used for toddy at night.

After dinner we sat round the hearth, sipping hot coffee, and learned that it was the custom for the young officers to take it in turns to keep the fire bright and clear with bellows. It happened to be our friend the doctor's night, and very well he did it. The grate was about three feet wide, and in the corner alongside was a bin full of wood in small logs, cut ready for use. The Gnatong curfew hour was 9 o'clock, and travellers must be up early, so we dispersed at the usual time.

We got safely back to the bungalow, where a good fire had been kept up, and were soon in bed and asleep. We both woke several times in the night, and had similar experiences. As the fire died down, and the air of the room became colder, it affected our breathing considerably. The slight exertion of putting an arm out of bed to rearrange a rug or draw up an extra blanket was followed by the most violent heart-beating. I could hear mine thumping away like a great sledge hammer, besides giving leaps as though it would jump out of my body. One's only chance seemed to be to keep quite still with head under the blanket.

Nazir, who had slept in the outer room, was let in early to light our stove, and then brought us tea and toast for *chota hazirec*. He went to refill a jug with cold water from a tub outside, and to our great amusement we heard a sudden crash followed by a horrified exclamation.

"Ai yah! ek dum baraf hai!"¹ as he discovered that he had banged the jug down on to a black surface of frozen water. His amazement was natural enough; the

¹ "Hallo! It's nothing but ice!"

man had never seen hail, snow, or any but artificially made ice before. And this night the thermometer had been 11° below freezing point.

I felt well, and was soon dressed ready to go out, but D. was prostrate with a violent sick headache, which he guessed to be the Gnatong headache and mountain sickness of which we had heard so much. When Dr. R. came to show us the best place from which to photograph the Fort, he gave D. something to take, and said he would soon get over it. I took some pictures, was shown the Fort battery, and then hurried back, to find D. dressed and feeling much better. Breakfast and the fresh air soon put him all right again, and he was able to take a photograph of the officers and soldiers in a group before we started for our day's outing.

One bad headache each was the limit of our personal experience of the mountain sickness which is so generally suffered from by those who venture into high altitudes. In his "Travels among the Great Andes of the Equator," E. Whymper has much to say on the subject. He studied the physical disturbance due to rarified air from several points, especially as to whether the effects were permanent or temporary only, but was never long enough in one place to give any definite answer. The experience gained in the Garrison Fort at Gnatong, by the many occupants whose average stay there was nearly two years, is most valuable. Officers and men generally found the period of *malaise* to last three weeks, during which many of them suffered very severely, while hardly any escaped altogether. After this period of probation very few felt any further ill effects from the high elevation. One point we ourselves noticed was the great difference in the influence of rarified atmosphere in different places of equal heights. In the east of Sikkim, on the Thibetan frontier, it is very much more trying than in the west, on

the frontier of Nepaul. This may partly account for the fact that in some mountainous districts it seems possible to ascend to a greater elevation than in others.

The officers of the Fort having kindly invited us to spend another day with them, we planned an expedition to the top of Bromhead Point with Dr. R., who promised us a magnificent view of the snows if fortune favoured us with a clear day. The road lay in the direction of the Tuko-La Pass leading to the Jeylap, so we actually made a double journey over this part of our trip. Fortified by



The road to Gnatong

a good breakfast at 10 a.m., we set out almost immediately after; D. having practically recovered from his brief attack of mountain sickness.

On leaving the Fort by the gate opposite to that we had entered on the previous day, we scrambled down the steep path to the Gnatong River, passing a few Bhootea huts, where D. secured a snapshot of a woman who took the palm for ugliness. The rigorous climate, hard work and coarse fare turn the women of these parts into veritable hags at a very early age, but the children keep

fat and jolly enough, notwithstanding the bitter cold they are subjected to.

The road from Gnatong zigzags up across a range which rises about half a mile beyond the Fort, and on the further side of which is the Tuko-La Pass, 13,550 ft. To the left of this pass, and about half a mile on the Gnatong side of it, is a high hill, Bromhead Point, so called in honour of Colonel Bromhead, who was severely



A Bhootea group at Gnatong

wounded here. When leading his plucky little Ghoorkha soldiers against the Tibetans, a hand-to-hand conflict took place between them and the enemy on the grassy slopes of this hill. Both fight with knives at close quarters, and at such moments reckless courage is apt to become savagery. The day was gained, and at a certain moment Colonel Bromhead dashed forward and held up his hand to stop one of his men from killing a couple of Tibetans, shouting to them to desist. The Ghoorkha

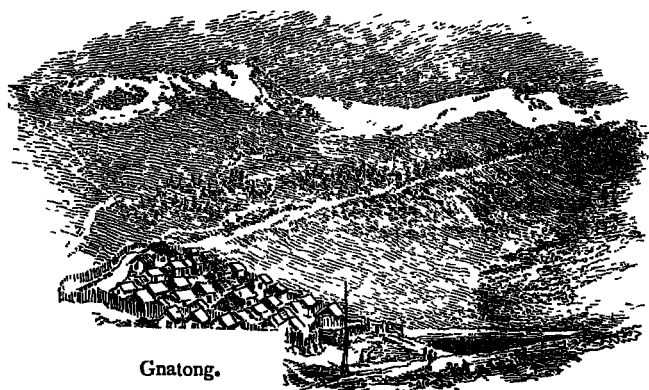
paused, but one of the Tibetans, failing to understand the officer's action, rushed impetuously forward and slashed at the arm of the man who had just saved his life.

The road from the Fort was tolerably bad, but later on we left it to climb the smooth, grass-covered and slippery hill, which Dr. R. told us was covered in spring time with blue gentian and pretty wild primulas. Taking a zigzag course, our ponies carried us up a good part of the way. When they could go no further, we took our alpenstocks, and panting, breathless and voiceless, succeeded in gaining the summit 14,000 ft. high.

The day was beautiful, with one of those perfectly clear skies and atmosphere absolutely free from mist, which is so rare in these high latitudes. The scene was one never to be forgotten, and never surpassed. The point on which we stood commanded a view right across the heart of Northern Sikkim, the snowy range being some fifty miles off as the crow flies. Our view was interrupted by no great height immediately in front, and in the perfectly pure atmosphere the whole country looked like a great valley at our feet, while the snow mountains, though at so great a distance, seemed far larger and loftier across the open space which left them exposed right down to their base as it seemed than they do when viewed much nearer, but from a height which dwarfs them by close contact.

Even with snow mountains, as we were soon destined to realize, "distance lends enchantment to the view." Stretched at our feet lay a dark valley, covered with rhododendron bushes, with jagged, snow-tipped, rocky points protruding from it, and beyond, rising straight up, as though from a much lower height than that on which we stood, was a magnificent range of snow mountains, with Kinchenjunga proudly standing in their midst. The great mountain, with the one exception of Mount Everest,

which is only a few feet higher, the greatest in the world, towered above its white-robed brothers like some giant god of Scandinavian lore, and rose before us in majestic beauty. The valley was wild and weird, but the mountains were the embodiment of the sublime; calm, eternal peace breathed from them, and one could only gaze in silent wonder. The whole range, sharply defined against the sky, shone with soft, translucent light, no tantalizing mist hid even one point from view; blue sky and sunshine were reflected from a thousand peaks, and



Gnatong.

we might have been gazing at huge rocks of purest opal, so many-coloured were the shades of softest azure blue and pink.

Four dogs had accompanied us on this expedition: "Chhumbi" and "Tuko," together with Dr. R.'s two four-footed companions. One was a large black retriever whose best days were over, but who was valued by his master as a famous dog to sleep with. In these high altitudes, where fleas and parasites of all kinds are unknown, a favourite dog is allowed to protect himself from the cold at nights by jumping on his master's bed,

and "Cæsar" was invaluable "for keeping the cold out of one's back," said our friend. "Dan" was a lively fox-terrier, here, there, and everywhere. The way he tore up and down the steepest precipices was a constant source of wonder to us. I noticed that the rarified air of the mountains never seemed to trouble the breathing of dogs to the extent it does that of ponies. Descending Bromhead Point, we were ready enough for the sandwiches brought for our lunch, but the dogs managed to coax us into giving them a good share.



British soldiers at Gnatong

About a mile from the pass on our way back to Gnatong, we met a party of Tibetan traders in wool who had just come from Llassa and were bound for Kalimpong. Trade has increased considerably within the last few years, and with greater facilities of traffic, Kalimpong has already become an important depôt for Tibetan produce. The little band we met consisted of five men. They had done their day's march, and were encamped in about as cold and bleak a spot as it would be possible to find. They had made a horseshoe, some twelve feet across, or large stones, within which their bales of wool were

stacked. In the centre of the ring was a huge fire, round which the men sat or lay close together, protected from the cold to some extent by their property, but with no covering overhead. We often met similar encampments during our travels; once in deep snow, which the men sat or slept on with the most heroic indifference.

On this first meeting we went up to the party, and were soon carrying on an animated and friendly conversation by means of signs and interjections, with some slight help in the way of interpretation from our Nepauli syces. They all had warm picturesque clothes, thick, heavy garments piled one over the other, giving them a decidedly stuffed-out appearance. They wore thick, felt snowboots, coming up over their knees, and the usual quaint Tibetan cap. We found them smoking long pipes with jade mouth-pieces, and tried hard to persuade them to sell us one, but they were too far from home to replace

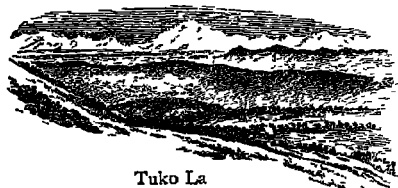


Mother and child

such an important adjunct to their daily life, and shook their heads with laughing but resolute refusal. We admired the little shallow wooden vessels in which they were drinking tea mixed with herbs, butter, and ashes, but still more the old and battered but artistic teapot in which this frightful concoction was made. Again they declined to sell, so we began questioning them about the character of the road to Llassa, and whether they would be willing to take us back with them. They seemed a good deal amused at us, and showed their appreciation of a

joke with hearty laughter ; but they are an astute people, and would have behaved very differently, I fancy, if we had met them beyond the frontier.

Before leaving, my husband offered them a taste of whisky from his flask, pouring about a teaspoonful into each man's wooden tea cup. It was most amusing to see the hesitation with which they sipped a few drops, followed by the gradual expression of enjoyment mingled with a sense of something uncanny, which spread over their faces. One man expressed the most unbounded satisfaction, holding out his cup for more, which he drank with his head thrown back and eyes half closed, while he passed his hand slowly down his body to indicate the



Tuko La

feeling of delightful warmth following the passage of the English fire-water. No picture of jolly monk represented with his unstinted supply of good Malmsey, is more typical of beaming, epicurean satisfaction, than was the sight of that Tibetan trader finishing the last dregs of whisky poured from D.'s flask. I was glad there was too little in it to do him any harm. We suggested mixing with water, but, like the Scotch guest, he preferred to thole it as it was !

Tibetans never travel without a small watch dog, and, knowing the demand for pretty puppies, they often bring one along with them for sale in Kalimpong or Darjeeling. It was in this way that "Tuko" had been purchased and named after the pass we were on. Our acquaintances

told us there were many dogs like him in Llassa. When I afterwards exhibited him at the Crystal Palace Dog Show, the learned judges of canine beauty were non-plussed, and refused to believe that he was a pure-bred Tibetan dog.

It was very cold when we got back to Gnatong just in time for tea, and it was now my turn for a bad headache, while D. was quite well again.

As we passed the sergeants' mess house, we found the young subalterns hard at work superintending its being converted into an attractive place for winter entertainments. They were putting an amount of zealous interest into the work that promised some delightful evenings for the men when the long winter days set in.

Toomhang came to report on the arrangements he had made for the next day, and we found that syces and coolies had procured rations from the military stores, besides purchasing woollen caps and other old clothes from the soldiers. Teptook had arranged for a joint of meat for us, and a few loaves in place of those we had used for the soldiers' *chota hazree* at Sedongchen. In return we left a piece of bacon and cheese with our hospitable friends, as their expected supply had been delayed an unreasonable time on the way. This, I fancy, was a state of things they had to put up with only too often.

We were up betimes the next morning, and after a good deal of arranging, packing, sorting loads and arguing, we managed to get all the coolies off by 9.30 a.m. They did indeed look a motley crowd as they filed out between the gates, wrapped up in all the clothes they possessed, some having donned a new purchase of soldier's coat, or woollen cap, in addition to their already very varied garments. We had arranged the loads as much as possible to avoid the unfastening of all the bundles, so that at the end of the day's march a certain proportion of the men

had only to deposit them in a safe place until the morning, and were ready at once to help the others pitch the tents and prepare the encampment. The men were by no means heavily burdened. Notwithstanding the extra rations they had had given them at the Fort, the ponies were steadily diminishing their loads at the rate of nine seers a day, besides the supplies we disposed of ourselves. But this was as it should be. We had the worst bit of road before us, and in many places the coolies would find it difficult enough to get over the ground with even the lightest loads. On the other hand, there was no fear that they would loiter unduly on the way when once started, seeing that we were now to travel beyond the limit of *bustees* or native bazaars; and believing, as they did, that these higher altitudes were the abode of *bhoots* or evil spirits, they were only too anxious to avoid being left alone on the road after dark.

CHAPTER X.

GNATONG TO LAGYAP-LA.

The road to the pass—The Jeylap—A peep into Tibet—Our camp at Kufu—Intense cold—A Sikhim gorge—An awkward situation—A stiff climb—Moraines—A barren hill—Tiphu—Camping in snow

AT 10 o'clock we were back at the officers' mess for breakfast, ready equipped for the journey, and almost immediately afterwards we bid farewell to our hospitable entertainers and set out for the Jeylap Pass. Again we followed that zig-zag road over the Derby Downs, as the soldiers called the hills lying at the back of the fort, and overtook our coolies by the time we reached the Tuko-La. Here we rested awhile, to let coolies and servants get slightly ahead of us again.

One man had orders to keep with us. He carried nothing but the big camera, a small tiffin basket and two umbrellas, as he was expected to keep pace with us at all times. This was the Nepauli we had taken on at Sedongchen, who had come into Sikhim through Tibet. He was the only one of our party who had actually traversed the route we purposed travelling to Guntok, and that only once before some months previously. We employed him, therefore, in the capacity of guide, and kept him with us to answer our queries about the road. He knew no Hindustani, so that all our conversation with him was carried on through the Nepauli syces. Good-humoured

and very simple, he was a source of endless amusement to us, and it was not long before we nicknamed him "Robinson Crusoe." His rig-out was most laughable. He had indented largely on the soldiers for cast-off clothes, wore a Balaclava cap, and a khaki-coloured coat and waistcoat—a world too wide for his slim, spare figure. Whenever the road was fairly good, and he felt called upon to enjoy himself, he opened one of the umbrellas and walked proudly along with it, and this always at



"Robinson Crusoe"

times when, according to our ideas, such shelter was absolutely unnecessary. He smiled simply when D. asked him if he were preserving his complexion, and met the syces' raillery on his assumed importance with invariable good humour, but did not therefore relinquish his pet pleasure.

The road to Tuko-La descends into a valley, then crosses a lower range of hills and passes the Bidang Cho Lake.

This ranks among the largest pools of water met with in the Sikkim Himalayas. They are very effective in mountain scenery. When the sun shines full on them, they are dazzlingly bright and generally as smooth as glass; but when buried in the shadow of the hills around, they are of almost appalling blackness, and one can hardly look into their murky depths without a shudder. Though this part of the road was comparatively level, it was so extraordinarily rough and stony that even I found it better

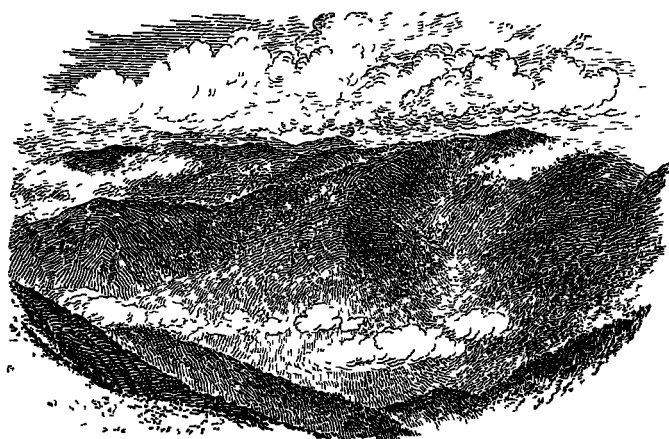
to dismount and pick my way on foot. Our progress was necessarily very slow in consequence. I rather wondered that the military authorities did not see fit to improve it as a party of soldiers marched along it to the Jeylap Pass and back once a week, entailing, one might suppose, an enormous expenditure in shoe leather. Perhaps it was not deemed advisable to make the road too easy beyond the British fort. It might help the enemy in case of an attack on Gnatong. Anyhow it got rougher and more stony till we arrived at a spot called Kufu where the road bifurcates; one branch of it leading north-east to the Jeylap Pass and the other to the north-west. The latter was a short cut to Guntok, whither we were bound. The scene was one of absolutely barren land without a tree or shrub of any kind. Here we ate our lunch and rested awhile; then left Toomhang to await the coolies and select a good place to camp in, which must be wherever he could find a little rhododendron scrub to give us fuel for the night.

It was about 2.30 p.m. when we started to climb to the frontier of Tibet. We were still some two or three miles from the pass. I mounted a fresh pony, the diminutive brown one, and D. took "The Plug," who had done but little work that day, as D. had walked all the way from Tuko-La. From Kufu onwards the road was very steep in parts, exceedingly narrow, and an almost continuous climb. Neither of us would have cared to walk it, and even the ponies stopped constantly for breath owing to the rarified air. "Robinson Crusoe" and two syces accompanied us. The hills, though generally covered with grass, were absolutely bare otherwise, and very stony, while in some parts they seemed a mass of solid rock.

It was 4 p.m. when we reached the Jeylap, 14,390 ft. It was devoid of vegetation, an even bleaker and more chilly spot than we had anticipated, although the sun shone brightly. Clouds partly obscured the view of

Chumalari, the huge sugar-loaf mountain which forms the great feature of this glimpse into Tibet, and it was quite covered before we could get out the camera. We consoled ourselves by taking an excellent picture of our immediate surroundings to make up for the indifferent ones of the more distant views on either side.

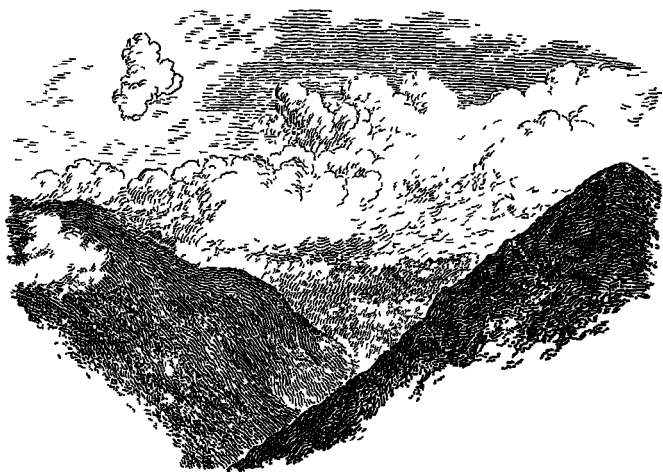
The Jeylap Pass is little more than an indentation in the ridge of the chain of hills which forms a natural boundary between Sikkim and Tibet. The ascent is fairly



Looking into Tibet

easy from either side. The boundary is emphasized by the remarkable stone wall which runs along the ridge. It is said to have been originally seven miles long, and to have been built by the Tibetan army in a single night. Be this as it may, there stood the wall, broken away in parts, and leaving the road clear, but typical of the jealousy with which the Tibetans strive to prevent our setting foot in their country, and of the ingenuousness of a people who had so little knowledge of European war appliances that they thought to keep out a British army by building a

wall which most Englishmen could vault over, strong and solid as it was. In common with nearly all dwellers among mountains, the inhabitants of the Himalayas erect cairns upon the top of hills which come within their travelling radius. They are a mere pile of stones for the most part, but in Sikkim at all events are ornamented with bits of coloured rag, signifying prayers, tied on sticks and stuck in between the stones. Our Nepaulis each



Looking towards Sikkim

added a stone to the cairn at Jeylap Pass, and I did my duty by replacing a fallen flag.

The character of the country before us was just the same as that of Sikkim, though we seemed to have traversed the wildest bit of mountain scenery, for the near ranges of the Tibetan hills appeared to slope more gently than those on our side of the pass. We saw a village in a valley a few miles off, and looked over in the direction of Rinchagong and Chhumbi. There was no one in sight.

The Tibetan guard had been withdrawn from the frontier line on the understanding come to with our military authorities that the boundary would be respected. Of course we walked down the hill for a hundred yards or so, just to say we had been into Tibet, but I don't know that we had any particular wish to see more of the forbidden land. [The frontier line has since been extended to a place called Yatung, about seven miles on the Tibetan side of the Jeylap] We found the cold so great that we had to take the distant-view photographs in the shelter of the Tibetan wall: even the dogs crouched under it

With a last look into the mysterious land of the lamas, we turned back and retraced our steps to Kufu with all possible speed in our anxiety to get to our camp before dark. One syce had collapsed on the way up with severe headache from the rarified air. We had left him lying by the roadside, and he was only just able to get up and return with us. A little further on his brother syce found a curiously scented flower and gave it to him to smell, whereupon Birman revived rapidly. This plant was very rare, they said, but grew at great heights, and was a specific for headache caused by strong air. We are not botanists, unfortunately, so we only smelt the flower, satisfied with its effect on our syce from whatever cause. Our own complete immunity from headache on this occasion may have been due to the fact that we rode all the way up to the pass, and did not fatigue ourselves by climbing, as we had on the previous days.

The sun had set before we reached Kufu, and the place we had left was silent and deserted. The syces shouted, and in a few minutes we saw a faint light coming towards us. A coolie had been sent with a lantern. With some little difficulty we made our way to the spot Toomhang had selected for our camp, about half a mile north-west of Kufu, which brought us back within the limit of



The Jolap Pass,
Showing the wall built by the Tibetans

fuel A few dwarf rhododendrons provided sufficient firewood, and we were glad to find our tent pitched and dinner nearly ready.

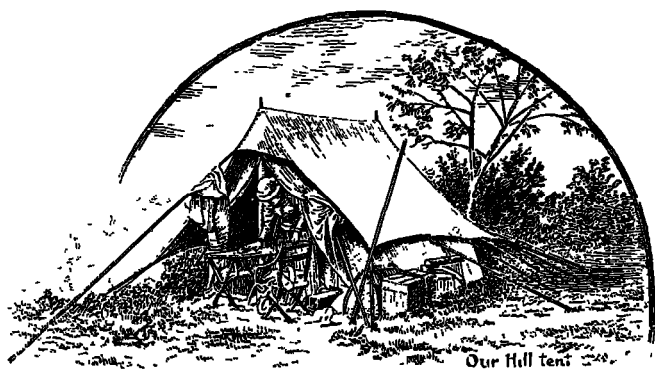
This was our first camping out in the open, and it was so dreadfully cold that we were thankful to get a hot meal and go to bed directly afterwards. The men had had time to prepare their own food and make arrangements for the night, so that by eight o'clock silence reigned in our camp, and we experienced the first strange sensation of being at the mercy of the elements and away from the haunts of civilized man. The cold was intense: some 12° below freezing point.

Our one 80lb. double-fly hill tent was not camping in luxury, but it was sufficient for our needs, and a larger one would have been practically useless in the absence of suitable camping ground. When the tent was pitched, a *dhurri* was spread over the ground inside, and our camp beds made up at the bath-room end,—for there was a small semicircular projection attached to the tent answering the purpose of a dressing-room. We had no mattresses on the canvas-stretched camp beds, but the thick rug we had bought from the Bhootea woman at Sedongchen served instead. When our beds were ready there was little more than a foot space on three sides of them, just enough room to pass, while the front part of the tent only afforded space for a small camp table and two chairs. Here we sat and dined by the open door of the tent, with rugs and shawls round us, but we generally found ourselves getting cold and stiff after the long ride, and as soon as dinner was over, though it might be only 7.30 p m., we were glad to turn out our camp table, drop the tent door, and prepare for bed. Under these circumstances, and when there was no use in getting up early, we were often on the horizontal the whole round of the clock—none too long, however, to rest our tired

limbs, all unused as we were to this open-air traveller's life.

At Kufu, the servants and coolies had arrived early enough to prepare their evening meal in good time, and soon settled down for the night. Some of the Lepchas slept among the scanty rhododendron bushes, the servants occupied the native *pal* we had brought for them, and the Bhooteas huddled together under the lee of an overhanging rock.

For a long time D. and I found it impossible to sleep,



—we were so bitterly cold, and this notwithstanding thick new blankets and resais. The cold seemed to penetrate everything. It was only after some time that we remembered that our Kalimpong friends had advocated the merits of sack beds. These were made by sewing blankets together on three sides, leaving only the top open to crawl into. We had been somewhat incredulous of their comfort, but could understand their value as we tried to sleep in the frosty air of Kufu. Eventually we got up shivering with cold, and rearranged the bed clothes, folding the ends of the things we had been lying on up,

and the coverings down over them, in the manner of a bag into which no draughts could penetrate. This plan was so successful that we got warm at last and slept soundly till morning.

We were always very keenly conscious of the drawbacks to camp life when we awoke to the prospect of a tub in the icy cold air. We needed warm water after our long residence in the plains of India, and managed well enough with the large tin pail we had brought for the purpose. It may be imagined that we did not dawdle over this part of our toilette, and we certainly felt all the better for the quick rub down in the bracing morning air, though our dressing-room was nearly as cold as outside.

Breakfast came next, and always began with a good plate of porridge made perfectly by our Lepcha cook, Toomhang's son, who was invaluable. He prepared our meals, often of several courses, excellently well, even under the most trying circumstances. He was named Teptook, i.e. six-fingered, from having a double thumb on one hand. The porridge had to be eaten with tinned milk, nothing else being procurable. A dish of bacon followed, and plenty of hot coffee, since we found a good morning meal to be of the greatest importance.

We had no special object in starting on our marches very early, and always liked to see the last coolie on his way before we set out ourselves, so that it was nearly 10 o'clock when we mounted our ponies to ride as far as possible on what we knew to be a trying march. We were now on a native path used by Bhooteas only. No village or bustee lay in the road, and we had very little chance of meeting any one for several days.

We had not gone far before it became necessary to get off our ponies to cross a mountain stream. Although narrow, the crossing was rough enough to show that no one had ever taken the trouble to make a fording place,

and we ran some risk of sprained ankles, as the stones were covered with a thin coat of ice and were very slippery. Having passed this and climbed up the other side, we found the road, or path, not more than a foot wide here, was on the side of the hill which formed the bank of the stream. We were thus walking on a kind of ledge, about a hundred feet above the water, which ran along the middle of a most precipitous grassy slope. This was one of the places pack ponies could not have passed. As it was, our animals could only just manage with saddles on their backs. We took our alpenstocks and trudged along in single file without much difficulty, as we were too accustomed to precipices by this time to fear vertigo, of which there is always a certain danger for the inexperienced. The rarified air is supposed to be the principal cause of this trouble, but a good morning meal had probably much to do with our absolute immunity from attacks of this kind. It was very wonderful to see the depth to which this narrow stream had cut its way through the mountain, and we hardly dared to look down into the black water below, half hidden in places by overhanging rhododendron bushes.

The sun was well up now. We were enjoying its grateful warmth, and had got about half-way down the gorge when Teptook, who was just behind us with Nazir, the kitmaghar, ran up to say that the latter was ill and could not move. The difficulties of the situation may be imagined. The path was so narrow and on so steep a slope that it was almost impossible to pass anyone on it. With great difficulty therefore we pulled ourselves up the side by planting our alpenstocks firmly in the bank, and just managed to allow the ponies, who were between us and Nazir, to pass by us. The man was evidently in great pain, and we had a *mauvais quart d'heure* wondering what we should do if he didn't get better soon. Teptook

was sent on at full speed to overtake the coolie whose box contained the whisky bottle. We had some time to wait as the coolie was well ahead of us. We sat down on the narrow path, with our feet hanging over the khud, and but for poor Nazir's groans would have thoroughly enjoyed this basking in the sunshine in the stillness and solitude of those wild mountain regions. D. questioned the sufferer, and obtained a very simple explanation of his indisposition. The cold had been too much for him: he had preferred to stay in bed till it was too late for him to cook his morning meal properly, and had eaten his dhal and rice before the latter was half cooked. When Teptook returned with the whisky, D. and he rubbed and shampooed the man vigorously. The occasion was pressing, and notwithstanding that he was a Mohammedan, D. poured some neat spirit down his throat—we had no water—telling him he must take it as medicine since we had nothing else to give him. He gurgled and spluttered as he drank, but the effect was prompt, and very soon Teptook managed to get him up, and half pushed, half dragged him along the dangerous road we had all had enough of by this time.

Turning out of the gorge, we came to another stream on the other side of which was a steep hill. Nazir was not in a fit state to climb it, so D. put him on his own pony. We couldn't help laughing at the man's fright, and the comical appearance he presented as he threw himself forward on his face, and clasped his arms tightly round the pony's neck. The syce flung the bridle over "The Plug's" head, held it loosely and mounted the hill, while the clever animal picked his way carefully after him, and climbed like the experienced mountaineer that he was. I rode "Ginger," who carried me bravely, determining not to be outdone by his comrade. To keep my balance at all, I had to ride with my head nearly

touching his mane. Every few yards he stopped, panting, as much on account of the rarified air as from the formidable climb demanded of him. The pull was tremendous : a thousand feet or more straight up in a narrow zig-zag and very rough path. None but a Bhootea pony could have accomplished such a task with a rider on his back : it was real climbing, impossible perhaps but for the roughness of the road, the rocky nature of which gave sure foothold to the clever animals.

Arrived at the top, we found ourselves on a grassy knoll, and as the combined influence of whisky, and the discomfort he experienced in riding, had restored our kitmaghar, he was able to go forward with the coolies, while we spent an hour resting our ponies and giving them a good feed of grass. It must be understood that the grass on these northern hills was too short to be of any use for ponies, so that when we came across a small patch long enough for a feed, it was most important to let them make a meal off it.

It was after this that we had our first, and, I am glad to say, only experience of moraines—valleys of wet bog and water. We had two to cross here, and had to pick our way most cautiously. Stones had been thrown down to form an irregular patch across, but we sank enough in the soft mud to feel the unpleasant possibility of being engulfed. The syces were very gloomy, and indeed it made one shudder to watch the moving masses of slimy mud all round us. In some places the boggy nature of the ground was half concealed by a reed-like growth. At times the path was so deceptive that we had to wait while the syces probed it in front of us, or collected stones from bits of firm ground, to give some extra security over a specially bad bit. "Tuko" nearly came to grief. His short legs prevented him from springing over dangerous places, as "Chhumbi" did with wonderful sagacity,



Toomhang, the Lepcha sirdar

so he was handed up to me, and I took him over on my lap. The ponies moved with the greatest care, as though they understood the danger of a false step.

The "slough of despond" passed, we lost sight of the track, and hardly knew which way to turn, as our guide had gone on to lead the coolies, and they were all quite out of sight. The dogs proved useful. In their delight at getting on to firm ground, they darted forward, and we followed, confident that they would scent the coolies without difficulty. They led us over a bit of smooth hill, and we sighted our men as they were fording another mountain stream. Crossing the valley which this traversed, we came to another rough climb, and dismounted to scale the rocky, barren hill before us on foot. Half-way up, we stopped to make a lunch off cold fowl, cheese and biscuits, while the ponies ate their corn. The valley below boasted nothing but half-inch grass and stones. We were beyond the limit of fuel, and had not seen a plant or shrub for miles. The scene before us was wild and desolate in the extreme, and, as we sat there, the wind blew colder, and then small hailstones came rattling down on us. We rather liked it at first, but Toomhang shook his head, and said he did not mind hail, but when it came down like wool it was bad, very bad.

More climbing, on our ponies' backs this time, with the hail falling on us, and we reached the top of this great mountain, and had attained the highest point of our tour. We didn't know the exact elevation, but it was certainly about 15,000 ft.

Snow clouds were gathering overhead, and there was no longer any warm sunshine to mitigate the cold, as we began a long descent over huge boulders. I rode as long as possible, though at the imminent risk of breaking my pony's legs, but had to dismount after a time. The road

was as bad as road could be, nothing whatever but broken rock and stones. It seemed as though some Titan had hurled enormous masses of rock against the side of the mountain; that they had split asunder and broken into countless pieces falling down the hill, tumbling over each other, until all traces of the soil beneath had been hidden from view. Our boots were cut to pieces as we scrambled down this difficult path, made ten times harder to get over by the falling hail which turned to soft flakes of snow before we reached the bottom of the hill, and whitened the ground rapidly.

We had been delayed so much in the morning that we only just reached the camping ground of which "Robinson Crusoe" had told us before darkness came on. The place was called Tiphu: it was our most northerly camping ground, and about 13,000 ft. high. It was too dark then for us to get a view of the surrounding country. We were on a bit of fairly level ground, bounded on two sides by high rocks. In the midst of these was a cave, of which Teptook and Nazir at once took possession and began making preparations for our dinner.

The tiny plateau sloped a little at one end, whether to a stream or not we were unable to distinguish. On this side there was an abundance of rhododendron scrub—though the bushes were less than two feet high and already white with snow. Some coolies cut away at this and stored it in the cave, but there was some difficulty in lighting a fire with the wet wood. The tents were pitched as soon as possible, and the snow swept away from the inside. Our bedding was carried wrapped in waterproof sheets, so had kept quite dry, and the canvas-covered basket trunks were impervious to wet. The ponies seemed likely to come worst off, but we saw them fed well and covered from ears to tail with the two thick blankets

allotted to each. D. put them in the shelter of the rock, and this was the best we could do for the hard-working animals who carried us so well. Very few bundles were opened that night.

By the time these camp arrangements had been made, we were not only thoroughly fagged out, but getting seriously anxious at the prospect of having to weather a snow storm at this most unapproachable spot. Teptook announced that dinner was ready. The hot soup was very welcome, but we were too tired and depressed to do justice to more substantial dishes, though we were a good deal touched to find that our excellent Lepcha cook had produced a triumph of his skill in the shape of a roly-poly pudding. Let those who must have every convenience to hand before they consent to cook at all think what this meant! Teptook's roly-poly was made under such difficulties that we never could understand how he did it, since we had not been in the place more than an hour, when it was dished up. We could only make a pretence of eating it, but we knew that the man wished to cheer and brighten our drooping spirits, and we were sure that, whatever might happen, Teptook would not fail to do his best under the most adverse circumstances. The men ate the food which had been cooked by a few of them for themselves and their comrades, and soon settled down for the night.

Silence reigned in our camp, but the snow had begun to fall heavily. Noiselessly as it came down, we heard the soft flakes passing through the still air. Our anxiety increased as we thought of the warnings given us by the officers at Gnatong, and of some of the "lost in the snow" stories they had repeated for our edification. Our stock of food would last a certain time, but if we were really snowed up, would any search be made for us? The

majority of our coolies were Lepchas : these people always shirk the higher elevations, live in the mild climate of the Sikkim valleys, and are utterly unprepared for travelling through snow

The prospect before us was not a pleasant one. We had only one coolie with us who knew the road, and he had been there but once before. We knew that a great quantity of snow might fall in the night, and that no path would be visible in the morning. The possibility of losing our way under the circumstances was greater than we liked.

As we sat talking things over and noted the increasing warmth of the tent, we saw that the weight of the snow had pressed the outer fly down on the inner one, and that this was already drooping so low that there seemed to be a very decided possibility of the tent collapsing altogether and falling on us. D. said something must be done to relieve the weight on it. With difficulty he succeeded in getting a few coolies to beat it off and tighten the ropes of the outer fly, to give us a little more security ; but the snow continued to fall, and this precaution couldn't be repeated if we and the men were to get any rest that night. D. and I found it difficult enough to sleep : when we did, it was to dream of being lost or buried in the snow. We awoke from time to time, conscious of the continuous fall, and sometimes tried to shake some of the snow from the roof, though we could do very little in this way from the inside. Tired and sleepy though we were, the night was a very broken one for both of us. Some hours seemed to have passed when I heard a sudden and loud report just over my head. I felt sure the tent pole had broken. D. had been asleep, so had not heard it. He assured me, when he woke later, that the pole was all right, but it was a long time before I could get to sleep again.

Morning dawned at last, and the snow had stopped falling, but it was two feet deep on the ground. The scene was a curious one. Our tent was dropping under the heavy snow, and the ridge pole at the top was broken and bent in V-shaped. The servants' *pal*, though still standing, was in much the same condition.

CHAPTER XI.

TIPHU TO GUNTOK.

A frozen tent—"Robinson Crusoe" to the fore—Lake Tanitso—The poisonous rhododendron—Yaks—A precipitous descent—The Roro Chu—A Bhootea's house—Leeches—A morning levée—The Rajah's road—Guntok

WE were lost in astonishment at the change that had come over the scene in a single night. We had not gone up to the snow hills, but they had come down to us, and in a way that must be seen to be understood. A heavy fall of snow is interesting enough in a hill station, but houses, roads, paths, are not less distinct for their white covering. Here, on the contrary, our tents were the only indication of man's presence; we could hardly tell whence we had come, and nothing of whither we had to go.

Seeing that we were awake, Toomhang came to tell us that some of the coolies had gone off to sleep in a cave known to "Robinson Crusoe." We had some men with us who could not be induced to lie under the pal, whatever the weather; they generally slept in the jungle, but in this case went to a cave about half a mile from our camp. That nothing would induce them to come back till the sun was well up we knew, and we could not move without a guide, but we were recalled to more immediate necessities by finding that it was impossible to get water, and that Teptook could only make a very small fire with the few half-burned sticks left in the cave from overnight. Breakfast had to be postponed till the next day. Coolies

and servants were in the same plight. The fire was lighted, and just served to heat one large *degchie* of coffee made with melted snow. This we shared with the men, as well as a tin of gingerbread nuts left out in the cave by chance. We had only three each all round. This was not much of a meal, but better than nothing, and it was impossible to get at anything else.

The Lepchas were terribly disheartened by the snow. They are not prepared for it like the Sikhim Bhootas, who live in higher altitudes, and wear thick cloth boots up to their knees, and very warm clothes like the Tibetans. But for D.'s energy, I believe they would have died



Our camp at Tiphu

where they were rather than exert themselves to get away. Some of the men tore strips of cloth from their dirty ragged under-garments, and bound them round their feet, covering them completely to protect them from contact with the snow. We found afterwards that those who failed to take this precaution suffered very severely from frost-bite.

Notwithstanding our eagerness to make a start while the sun was shining, it took the coolies a long time to find their loads and dig them out of the snow, and the tents had to be thawed somewhat before it was possible to fold them; for when the snow was knocked or cut from the

sides, the cloth was found to be frozen and as hard as a sheet of tin.

The wanderers having turned up, and the last coolie having found his load, we prepared to start. "Robinson Crusoe," who carried the camera and a small tiffin basket only, led the way, while we followed. Toomhang was instructed to bring up the rear, and not allow a single man to lag behind him. We had been able to have the ponies well fed luckily, so D. mounted "The Plug" and I little "Lingtu." We formed a small advance party; the rest were to follow our track through the snow.



The Coolies
of our
Camp

It was now about 10.30 a.m., and the sun was shining brightly. We had no coloured glasses with us, and the dazzling whiteness would have been unbearable but for the blue gauze veil I had cut in two, so that D and I could each pin a piece over our eyes. The men blackened their eyelids and all round their eyes with a piece of burnt wood, which gave them a curiously weird look. It seemed effectual, as none of them suffered from snow blindness.

As far as we could tell, our way lay along the side of a ridge of hills and then over the top of a high point. Our progress was very slow; there was no path or road dis-

coverable, and we could only hope that "Robinson Crusoe" was taking us in the right direction. He seemed to be guided entirely by the shape or outline of the hills, and was engrossed in his difficult task. Three times in the course of the first hour he lost his way, and on each occasion we had a trying five minutes or so when we stopped and waited for him to reconnoitre.

It was hard work for the poor animals, but they were better able to scramble through the snow than we were. Sometimes their feet slipped over the side of a boulder, or sank deep into the snow; at others we narrowly escaped falling into a hole, and often had to wait while the syces prodded the ground with alpenstocks to find a footing for the ponies. Fortunately the snow was firm for some time.

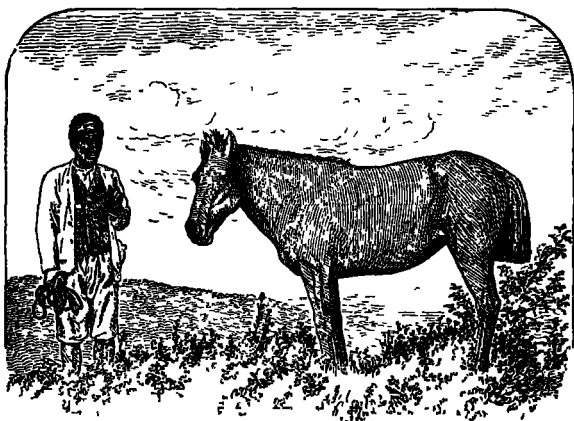
We had heard of the beauties of Lake Tanitso, and when a sudden descent brought us within sight of it we hailed it with delight, not only for the sake of its scenery, but as being a landmark showing us that we were on the right way. The east side of the lake was solid ice for some distance, and looked dazzlingly beautiful in the brilliant sunshine. We stood where the lake ended in a narrow, shallow overflow between high banks, and here we waited awhile until the last coolie had arrived. In this short time a complete change came over the scene. Heavy white clouds rolled up from the valleys below until they gathered over the summit of the hill above Tiphu. Toomhang warned us to hasten. As we climbed laboriously over the great boulders which formed the northern bank, the sky clouded, mist rose over the water, and it was soon hardly possible to see across. Whether or not there was any path along this rough bank we certainly found none, but struggled over the rocks, sometimes far above the water, but often within a foot of it. The lake was apparently about a mile and a half long,

but narrow. Towards the middle the water looked fathomless. It was perhaps a greater experience to see it as we did than under more favourable conditions. The deep still water looked strangely cruel, half shrouded in a chill mist that penetrated everything. Even the white banks seemed to have turned blue with cold now that the sun no longer shone upon them, and the snow clouds gathering rapidly overhead warned us to hurry onwards. The awful desolateness of the scene, where neither man nor beast could live, did more to enable us to realize what snow mountains really are than months of gazing at them from a distance.

It took us something like two hours to pass Lake Tanitso: we had mounds of boulders covered with deep snow to climb over. Once past it, we soon got into the region of vegetation: there was less snow, and something in the nature of a path became visible. By this time we were safe from the danger of being lost in the snow. It was a great relief, but we were faint and exhausted. We had not been able to replenish our tiffin basket as usual. It only contained part of a bottle of ginger wine, left from the previous day, and two sticks of chocolate. We munched the latter slowly to make it last as long as possible, and shared the ginger wine with "Robinson Crusoe" in gratitude for his good guidance. He appreciated it as much as the Tibetan trader had the whisky, and the syces looked on enviously, but approved our action, they, too, were most grateful to him for having led us through that unknown country safely. The ponies had their corn as usual. When Toomhang had brought up the last straggler, we proceeded on our way.

From this point we travelled steadily downhill, through a forest of stunted deodars and rhododendrons; the snow became slush, and the path even more slippery. Half an hour later "The Plug," finding there was still no prospect

of grass, nibbled at the leaves of a rhododendron tree. Ke-Jani cried out in alarm, but it was too late. The rhododendron leaf is poison to all animals: Tibetan shepherds muzzle their cattle when they drive them through the higher altitudes of Sikkim, where the rhododendron is the only shrub met with. We had been ignorant of this danger hitherto, and it was a new trouble, when, about two hours afterwards, the pony showed symptoms of great distress, and frothed at the mouth.



The "Plug"

To ride him further was out of the question, but the syce managed to get him along slowly. Fortunately he had only time to take a leaf or two, and so happily recovered in a few days.

We had forded two streams and got nearly clear of the snow when sleet began to fall, but soon turned to rain. We met some Bhoteas travelling in our direction, but could get no information from them, as they could not understand us, nor we them.

Further on we came upon yaks. Never having seen

any before, we were much interested in these strange animals, with their large thick tails, trailing long coats and curious humps. "Chhumbi" and Tuko became frantic with excitement, barking at them furiously. The Bhootea camp was a little lower down on a small maidan, and we got some yak's milk to drink, but found it nauseous and could only take a little. The herdsmen had a tent of dried yak skins tanned brown. It looked curious and interesting, and must have afforded very perfect protection from the inclement weather. Here we should have stopped for the night, but besides objecting to the close proximity of a herd of yaks, rain was falling steadily, and we were so anxious to make an attempt to get into better weather, that, tired and hungry as we were, we decided to go on further.

One of the great difficulties of travelling in Sikkim is the impossibility of getting any accurate information about the road from the natives. On this occasion we could not understand the speech of the few Bhooteas we met, and our coolie guide said it was only a little way to the Roro Chu. Considering that the man had only been in this part of the world once before, the mistake he now made about the distance was very excusable. We knew quite well that all the rest of our party were as ignorant of the road as we ourselves were, but somehow they were all of the opinion that we must be close to some native village, while their taking this for granted so impressed D. with a similar feeling, that he had quite made up his mind that we were within a few hours of Guntok. For myself, I think, I was too tired to speculate on the subject one way or another. As a matter of fact, we were really at the top of Lagyap-La, and were starting on a descent of 6000 feet in seven or eight miles, almost without a level spot on the road.

It was soon impossible to ride, the path being a mere

waterway, probably impassable in the rains, and even now we were walking or slipping along in the middle of a small stream of water caused by the heavy rain. It was terrible work, and we were almost in despair at finding no sign of level ground large enough to pitch our tent on. We were beginning to think that we should have to climb up again as far as the Bhootea camp, when about two miles down we came upon a small open green on which there was an empty shed—nothing but a roof of split bamboo stuck up on four posts. It was leaking badly, and the ground underneath was soaked with the driving rain. Poor as this shelter was, it seemed a haven of refuge. Birman strewed the ground with wet bamboo chips, and spread a damp blanket, taken from the bundle "Ginger" carried, over them.

Wet to the skin, and almost starving, having had nothing but chocolate to eat since our meagre *chota hasree* in the morning, we sat down on the wet rug to await the coolies. It was about 5 p.m., and we had over two hours to wait. Nazir had forgotten or lost the matches entrusted to him, and we could get neither light nor fire. The best part of the time was spent in trying native dodges to obtain a spark, in which D. took an active interest, but the wood was not the right kind, and was besides so wet that nothing could be done. Toomhang was with us, as he always preferred to be when not actually ordered to keep with and bring up the coolies as he should have done, but we liked gossiping with the fine old man, who was of much too gentle a nature to be a coolie driver. When he told us there would be at least five feet of snow on Tiphu at our last camping ground, by the morning, we knew that he was right, and consoled ourselves for all our troubles at the thought of the happy escape we had had.

All the coolies turned up at last but one old man, who

was reported to have stayed in the Bhootea camp as his feet were too painful to come on. In time we got fire, dry clothes and dinner. The ground outside being so wet, we had had the inner fly of our tent pitched under the shed, and found the arrangement a very comfortable one, but the men who crowded round the shed for the night had a bad time with the leeches; the ground was alive with them. Later on the rain stopped, and we forgot our troubles in sound sleep, only broken occasionally by the groaning and grumbling of the coolies outside as they tried to elude these disagreeable blood-suckers.

On waking the next morning, we were glad to find that the rain still held off, though the sky was threatening, and nothing could be properly dried in the damp atmosphere. The missing coolie had turned up early, and some of our men had been in search of water. They had had to bring it a long distance, so we all had to manage with as little as possible.

Unfortunately the severe cold, fatigue and drenching proved too much for me. I was almost unable to move, and it became a serious question how I was to get on, though it was certain we could not stay where we were. I had dressed with great difficulty, but we had still several miles of the precipitous waterway before us, and the ponies could not carry me. Indeed, their getting down at all was a feat in itself. It was equally certain that I could not walk. In this difficulty, Birman, the syce, came forward and offered to carry me in a chair on his back: Teptook, the cook, volunteered to relieve him when tired.

At first the idea seemed very alarming: I protested, and said I should be too heavy.

"Oh, dear no," replied Birman, "I carried the padre sahib two days before he died," referring to a missionary who had become seriously ill at a high elevation, and

succumbed to the rigours of the climate he had braved too suddenly after a long spell in the plains

Ill as I felt, I couldn't help laughing at Birman's consolatory speech.

It seemed that the road was too bad for me to be carried on one of our canvas beds, so I had no choice but to consent to this novel and somewhat ignominious method of progress. A small folding canvas chair was carefully arranged with ropes and straps, through which the man put his arms, while one strong band went across his head. Seated in this chair, facing backwards, I was hoisted carefully up, and soon found myself surprisingly comfortable. At first I was very much afraid of being dropped suddenly, but soon acquired confidence in the wonderful surefootedness of my bearer, and felt immensely relieved and grateful to be off my feet.

Our progress was necessarily very slow. The road was so bad that it might be considered a mountain staircase of the roughest possible description, since it was only a steep watercourse through a thick forest of jungle, following the saddle-back of the spur, and many miles long. We had got about half-way down when it began to rain again even more heavily than the day before, and the stones and clay soil were soon so slippery with the running water, that it was marvellous how the men carried me in safety. That they did so by turns for about five hours, and did not seem to find me at all heavy, shows how strong these hill people are.

It was piteous to see the way the poor ponies struggled along, slipping often and coming down on their haunches. As the rain fell more heavily, D found it all he could do to keep upright with the little rivulets of water running round his feet in their passage to the river below. Sometimes, too, a great boulder lay in the middle of the path, and it was no easy matter to get round it.

The bottom of this interminable hill was reached at last, and we crossed the Roro Chu on a rough bamboo bridge. The river was in flood after the rain—an impetuous rushing torrent making a line of white foam as it tore along its stony bed. The steady rain, continual drip, drip of the trees, and the darkness of the jungle were very depressing, and it was hard to keep our spirits up. We found a rock under which to shelter while we ate our



tiffin, but there was no dawdling over it, as we had to be continually dodging the leeches. When we had finished I mounted the little pony to climb up the other side of the river, though at first it was almost as stony and steep as on the Lagyap-La, and we often had to dismount for short distances and scramble up specially steep places.

A mile or two further, and we came suddenly upon a

few scattered houses, the first we had seen since we left Gnatong. It was getting dark rapidly, the road was hardly a pleasant one for night travelling, and we were tired and wet through again. Toomhang, who had been interviewing the Bhootea inhabitants, suggested that we should stay there for the night, as one of the men, who owned a large house with two rooms in it, had consented to let us have one. We willingly agreed to the proposal, more especially as our tent was still quite wet and the ground was soaking.



Sikhim Bhooteas

Five minutes afterwards we stepped into the Bhootea's house. It was built entirely of wood raised on piles, and was surrounded on three sides by a verandah. A short passage led to a large and fairly lofty room, the better of the two in the house. The plank walls were tolerably solid on three sides, but the one with the verandah beyond was more like a rough kind of lattice-work, admitting some light and giving capital ventilation. There were two or three sliding wood panels, answering the purpose of windows when open. The place belonged evidently to a well-to-do man of the better class, since he

was sufficiently well off to build such a comfortable and roomy dwelling.

A bright fire, built on a large mud square or tray, was burning at one end when we went in, the greater part of the smoke passing out through a hole in the roof, though enough was left in the apartment to set us off coughing. Two old cronies were warming themselves at either side of the fire. Several younger women with babies and one or two men completed the party. The ceiling was hung with dried pods of Indian corn closely packed in straight rows; and all round the room were bundles of clothes or blankets, long baskets containing various sorts of food, mysterious-looking boxes, a few cooking utensils, and one or two shelves on the walls. A bamboo bedstead, with nothing on it, was the only article of furniture in the room. Everything in the place was black with smoke.

We and our numerous hosts stood looking at each other with equal curiosity and interest, while Toomhang hastened to get our camp chairs and bedsteads unpacked. Some of our luggage was brought inside, and the rest stowed away in the verandah. Our Bhootea friends were so much interested in our arrangements that they left us with the greatest reluctance, going out one by one, carrying their bedding with them.

At last we were by ourselves; there was no communication between the two rooms except from the outside, but there were so many chinks in the walls that we thought it advisable to improvise a screen with our rugs and shawls, and then we were able to change our wet clothes and hang them on the many bamboos crossed above round the fireplace to be dried or well smoked! We were not a little horrified to find that our feet and ankles were covered with leeches. I got off fairly well, but my husband, who had walked nearly all day, had at least twenty on him. I had knocked two off his neck

before, and now he found one in his hair. When empty their bodies were like long black threads about the thickness of vermicelli, but when full of blood they were huge, soft, black lumps. It was most repulsive to have to take them off one. D.'s legs and ankles looked like raw beef, so covered with blood were they. "Tuko" got one up his nose which remained there for weeks. These hill leeches are much smaller and darker in colour than the domestic leech, but the bite must be poisonous in some way; for, although not felt at the time, they cause considerable irritation of the skin for many weeks afterwards.

In spite of the strangeness of our surroundings, we slept soundly that night. The place seemed perfectly clean in the most important sense, all insects being smoked out, I fancy, so that we awoke in the morning much refreshed and pleased to find that it was fine again.

It was only just daylight when the door opened quietly and our host appeared. My husband whispered to me to take no notice, and we watched him as he rummaged in various baskets and took away the things he selected from them. He had not been gone long when a woman came in search of cooking utensils. What their account of us could have been I don't know, but in the course of the next half hour we had many visitors. Most of them came in, looked at us quietly for a minute, and then went out again. We began to feel as though we had gone back to the old days when our ancestors held levées in bed. When we wanted to dress, we found it necessary to make the bearer mount guard at the door and refuse admittance to any one. No sooner was the door opened again than in trooped our admirers. They came in groups this time, babies and all, and watched us eating our breakfast, buttoning our boots, and preparing to start, with the liveliest interest. D. chaffed and joked with them by signs, for even Toomhang and the syces, who

were our best linguists, could only carry on a broken conversation with them. On leaving, D. gave the owner of the house a couple of rupees for our night's lodging, with which he was more than satisfied ; and we departed, after exchanging cordial smiles with this most amiable and interesting family.

We were only two or three miles from Guntok, and soon got on to a comparatively broad and level road which we were told was called the Rajah's Road. It was part of that by which the Rajah of Sikkim was wont to travel · we crossed it again at various points of our march, and generally found it kept in fairly good order. Here it was bordered on one side by a thick bramble hedge, overgrown in many places, so that we often had to stop while the syces pushed the thorny branches on one side, or beat them down to let us pass in safety.

It was delightful to have bright sunshine again. The country looked very beautiful after the rain, and again presented that characteristic of many contrasting colours, peculiar to the cultivated area of the lower districts, which we had admired so much round Kalimpong, but which, of course, was absent in the wild scenery of the barren heights we had passed through more recently. It was difficult to realize that it was only three days since we had been in danger of being lost in the awful stillness and solitude of Tiphu and Lake Tanitso. As we approached Guntok, houses and people became more plentiful. We passed groups of coolie girls resting by the wayside, men and women working on their little plots of land, and everywhere we saw signs of prosperity and of busy and contented lives. Further on, the banks on either side of the road were lined with bright yellow primulas, which reminded us of the home primroses, while here and there wild cherry trees, covered with beautiful pink blossoms, were dotted about the landscape.

On first arriving, about noon, we made straight for the post-office, where quite a budget of letters awaited us. Among others, one from the Political Resident, who, although a stranger to us, and temporarily absent in Darjeeling, had sent us a hospitable welcome and kindly invitation to stay at his house for a few days to recruit. I need hardly say that we accepted this offer with gratitude. The ponies needed to be reshod, and their hoofs were all worn down. Many of the coolies were still suffering from frost-bite, and, although fairly well again myself, I felt that a few days' rest would be a great boon.

Half an hour later, we had made our way to the Residency, and received a hearty welcome from a young officer and his wife, who were guests there also.

It was very pleasant, after the amusing difficulties of our toilet in the morning, to revel in the luxury of a well-furnished bed and dressing-room, and a comfort to have our clothes and tent properly dried. Luncheon was ready by the time we were. When we had finished, a sheep was brought round for inspection, as D. had ordered Toomhang to procure one as *baksheesh* for our men. The purchase was effected for about seven rupees, and gave very general satisfaction. Later on, D. was present at the division of the slaughtered animal, and was much interested in the absolute fairness displayed. Every morsel was distributed, one man taking the skin as part of his lot, and all seemed perfectly satisfied. If any one had a Benjamin's share, it was "Robinson Crusoe," who was as in high favour among them as he was with us.

There seemed to be no race feeling of antagonism among the coolie class, though the various hill tribes were continually at war with each other before the days of British rule.

CHAPTER XII.

GUNTOK TO RAMTEK.

The Intchi monastery—Lamas—The Rajah's palace—A young disciple—The mess house—Ponies' troubles—Picnic to Penlong-La—Setting out again—Wayside seats—A bank of beauty—A wire bridge—Ramtek Goompa—An improvised bedchamber—Balustrade of prayer-wheels—The big wheel—Bad news of the road—Tuko's strange behaviour

TUMLONG, some sixteen miles to the north of Guntok, was the old capital of Sikhim, Guntok is the modern one. The latter is a pretty and quiet place, with gentle slopes; it is easy of access, and not more than 6000 feet high. The climate is pleasant, except in the rainy season. Snow seldom falls there, and wild flowers abound after the rains. English vegetables grow well, and pigs from home stock are reared successfully. The Rajah generally lives in a palace built on the top of a hill. A small detachment of troops is stationed near by. The native inhabitants are Sikhim Bhooteas for the most part, and are a prosperous and well-to-do people. On the highest point of Guntok is the Intchi monastery. The picturesque and comfortable home of the English Political Officer is built on the slope of a hill a little below it.

Having planned a visit to the Intchi Goompa, we climbed up the steep path on foot. Buddhist monasteries are nearly always on the top of a hill, in the coldest and most exposed positions. There was nothing specially remarkable about the one we were going to see, nor



Lamas

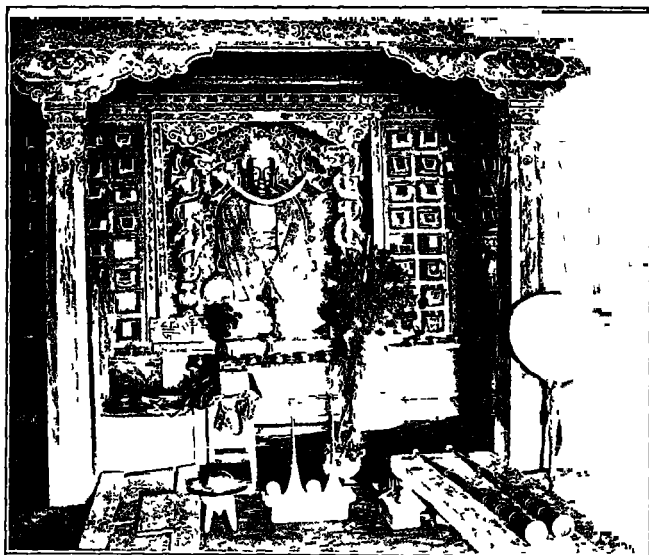
had it won renown through the piety of its founder or the fame of its disciples. Though comparatively small, it was, however, a fair specimen of this class of building, and we were the more interested as it was the first of its size we had come across in our journeyings.

The three resident lamas received us affably; and when we asked to be allowed to photograph the interior, they consented with pleasure, and did all they could to help us by bringing as many of the accessories to their worship as possible within the limited view of the camera. The picture represents the altar of Gautama Buddha, before which flowers and incense are offered daily. The rows of shelves on either side, divided into square compartments, contained the oblong-shaped sacred books which are mostly copied in Llassa, and often extensively illuminated. Rough beams of wood, raised a little above the floor, made a kind of central aisle, and served as seats for the worshippers. The trumpets, bells, and tambourines were collected and placed in front for our benefit. The rough floor, ceiling and pillars, florid decoration and doubtful frescoes on the walls, portraying the adventures of their carnal-minded gods, were all of the usual type, but the lamas were evidently very proud of them, and satisfied with the general effect.

We found these men cleaner and more respectable-looking than the majority. Although so powerful among the people, the Bhuddhist priests seem to be often drawn from a low class, and their faces are frequently repulsively expressive of greed and cunning. We saw very few of a higher type, and although these three men were pleasant and honest-looking, they were far from being refined or intellectual. They seemed flattered when, after photographing the interior of the monastery, we expressed a wish to take them also. But first they climbed the outside staircase to get to the loft or upper story of the

building, which served them as dwelling-house and store-room, and dressed themselves in sacerdotal garments, as being more in accordance with their dignity

The head lama, who stands in the middle of the picture, had the rosary, which so closely resembles that used by Roman Catholics, in his left hand, and a small silver, turquoise-studded prayer-wheel in his right. It was with



Interior of Intchi Monastery

some difficulty that we persuaded him to cease making the latter revolve with a deft, energetic movement of the wrist while he chanted the usual formula. "*Om mani padme om re*"

Before we left, a couple of hard-boiled eggs were brought to us, together with a large jug of merwa with a clean straw through which to suck it. It would have been churlish to refuse this well-meaning hospitality ;

and after sipping the national drink made from fermented grain, which I thought very nasty, I made an heroic effort to eat one of the eggs without bread or salt. D. got off by taking repeated pulls at the merwa, which he found fairly palatable.

The rest of the day was spent in developing negatives, as we had a large stock of exposed plates by this time.

The next day we visited the Rajah's palace, which was some distance from Mr. W's house. The Rajah was away, having been invited to try change of air, while the English Government repaired and fortified his residence. We found it to be a huge barn-like building of mud, stone, and wood, uninteresting in every way, and absolutely devoid of any sort of comfort. The Rajah was not popular with any but the surly Bhooteas of the higher elevations. He had played us false more than once, and had had to be made to feel

"The velvet scabbard held a sword of steel."

So there was never much intercourse between him and the English residents at Guntok. He was described to us as being ungracious in manner and appearance, and displeasing to look at on account of a strongly-marked hare-lip.

Before we left this bare-looking place, dignified by the name of palace, a little boy came out of one of the side rooms, closely followed by a lama. They knew the young officer who accompanied us, and we learned that the boy was the eldest son of the Rajah of Sikkim, vowed to the priesthood, according to custom in the ruling family, while the second son assumes the temporal sovereignty after his father's death. It is therefore by right of birth, as well as piety, that the Great Lamas at Llassa, among whom this boy would one day rank, have such absolute power over the Himalayan tribes

This little fellow might have been some nine years of

age. He was well dressed and good-looking. An intelligent face, with large eyes full of a great seriousness, showed him to be oppressed even then with mystical knowledge and unchildlike thoughts; to us there was something very sad about his solemn little countenance. We heard that he was studious and thoughtful, and already far advanced in study of the sacred books. The lama, a tall, strong man, seemed to be a student also, and very devoted to the quiet, gentle little boy, who was evidently of an affectionate disposition, and much attached



Guntok

to his tutor. The lama had lifted the boy to his shoulders as he stood and talked to us, and somehow we felt that the action implied the difference he realized in our respective positions, even if we did not.

Later on, when we asked him if he were not the boy's teacher, there was something very touching in the way he took the child's hand, placed it on his bowed head, and answered, "I am his servant and his slave," with a depth of humility which astonished and silenced us. To him the soul of that Rajah's son, born to spiritual supremacy, was on a far higher plane than ever he could

hope to attain. But we had questioned enough, and now he put the boy down, took his hand, bid us an austere farewell, and led him away again

The picture of Guntok shows the palace on a low hill to the extreme right. The group of long, low buildings to the left were the soldiers' barracks. Half-way down the slope towards the road stood the old mess house, a tumble-down, thatched line of rooms then occupied by the two officers and the doctor attached to the regiment. They had kindly invited us to lunch with them, and we arrived at our destination just before heavy rain fell. It will be seen from the separate illustration that our officers'



quarters are not always stiff, solid lines such as we are used to see at home. There was a picturesque pathos about the bamboo-propped verandah, lopsided tree in the middle of the tennis court, and general appearance of the interior they would, I think, have gladly dispensed with.

We just managed to crowd into a small square room, already pretty well filled with masculine belongings, and didn't wonder when our hosts told us they lived practically out-of-doors except in bad weather. We made a lively party, though, perhaps, I looked a little uneasily at the ceiling when the doctor told us of the narrow escape he had had a few days before by sleeping out in the verandah. The next morning he found half the ceiling of his room

had come down in the night, just where his bed would have been had he stayed inside !

It got chilly after the rain, and a fire was lighted, but there were no proper chimneys, so it smoked, as we were led to expect, and our hosts explained that they seldom had a fire even in winter without having to sit with the door wide open to let out the smoke. New officers' quarters have been built since we were at Guntok, so this is only a record of the past

We had now been over two days in this rural capital of Sikkim, so when we got back to the Residency we had a parade of coolies and ponies. The men were all refreshed and well, with the exception of the old man who had fallen out on the march from Tiphu ; he asked to be discharged and sent back to Kalimpong. We gave him a small load of things we had done with, and wanted taken to our friends there, to be forwarded to Calcutta, and then paid him up and sent him away to travel by easy marches to his home. D. then selected the two best and most reliable coolies, and instructed them to make a rapid march to Pedong by the shortest road they knew—this they could easily do, travelling without loads. At Pedong they were to get the two boxes of stores we had left at the rest-house, and bring them on to us by the road we intended taking. Teptook would arrange to let them know which way we had gone by signals on the wayside. Money was then advanced to all the men to buy food in the bazaar for themselves and the ponies, and a new ridge pole was procured for our tent.

Unfortunately we found that neither "Ginger" nor "The Plug" were fit to proceed—their hoofs had not yet grown sufficiently to allow of their being re-shod. Little "Lingtu" was in capital condition, however, and had already been fitted with a new pair of shoes. A strong white pony had very kindly been offered to D. for the



Waterfall near Penlong-La.

remainder of the journey; and finding that it could really be spared, we were only too pleased to accept. Its own syce would go with us to bring it safely back from Darjeeling, and we finally arranged that Ke-Jani should be left behind with "Ginger" and "The Plug," and bring them on to Darjeeling by the short road in a week or ten days' time. He was a good deal disappointed at being left behind, but he was less useful to us than his brother, and he was promised the same wages if he brought the ponies to us safely.

Late that evening Mr S. arrived, quite unexpectedly, from Kalimpong. He was *en route* for the old capital, Tumlong, and everyone was delighted to see him. We hadn't time enough at our disposal to go so far north, especially as it would give the coolies two extra marches of sixteen miles each; but we planned a picnic for the next day to Penlong-La, a pass about six miles on the way, where we were told there was a fine view of Kinchenjunga.

The morning dawned fresh and beautiful after the rain, and we set out betimes, sending some servants on before to prepare luncheon. The scenery was very beautiful; dense forest, and surprisingly rich undergrowth with giant creepers filling every nook and corner and trailing over everything. Some miles on a bend in the road gave us a grand view of a double waterfall, above and below the path. The small size of the man in the picture will give an idea of the fine expanse of falling water we saw sparkling like diamonds in the sunshine. When we reached the Pass—a narrow passage between high rocks—we found the view obstructed by thick white clouds which hung over everything, so there was nothing to prevent our climbing at once to the delightful nook under spreading trees which had been selected by the servants for our midday meal. The time passed so pleasantly that we

were loth to break up the party, but at last it was necessary for Mr. S. to be getting on his way and for us to return to Guntok. Just before we separated, Kinchenjunga showed his crest above the fleecy clouds, and we turned away with our minds full of thoughts of the beauty and lofty grandeur of this glorious mountain height which foot of man has never scaled, and probably never will.

Three days and nights in comfort and luxurious ease at Guntok made us quite fit for roughing it again. On the morning of the fourth day we were up betimes, giving Toomhang the moral support of our presence as he



re-arranged the loads among the fifteen coolies—including “Robinson Crusoe,” who had to carry his share with the others, until the two men sent round by Pedong could overtake us. All had been despatched when we went into breakfast; and after being fortified by a good meal, we bid farewell to our Guntok friends, mounted our ponies, and once more set out on our travels.

The weather was now settled again, and we purposed journeying westward to the Nepaul frontier. It was a beautifully bright morning when we started, bound for the Ramtek Goompa. At first our road lay along the

valley of the Singtan, towards Pakyong. It was easy riding, and the ponies ambled nimbly along, or cantered up the gentle slopes with real enjoyment. The winding path disclosed new beauties continually: sometimes a picturesque native hut, built on the wayside, added life to the scene, or a bend in the richly-wooded bank showed a natural resting-place in some twisted projecting trunk or moss-covered rock, occupied perhaps by rural travellers who knew nothing of the bustle and haste of city toil, but whose lives were governed by the peaceful calm and content of the happy valley they dwelt in.

One such spot we found on this Guntok road, which was of surpassing beauty. A sharp bend inwards forming a secluded corner with an almost perpendicular bank of forest growth above the path.

Grand old trees, young saplings, graceful bamboos, creepers innumerable, ferns, wild flowers, hanging mosses, all centred round a tiny cascade of delicate spray falling into a stone-bound pool, with the white foam on its surface, where the shower broke upon rocky steps, contrasting with the



Travelling lamas.

clear darkness of the shadowed depth of the stiller water in front. The sun shone brightly on this grand natural bower as we came up to it, and threw lights and shadows upon the luxuriant vegetation, until it presented a picture of verdancy that covered the whole gamut of colour tones of greens and browns, and silvery tints and yellow touches.

We dismounted to linger in this enchanted spot, and could hardly tear ourselves away from it.

Soon after this we left the main road for one that branches off to the west. From this point we had a rather

long descent to the Rahnī, a tributary of the Roro Chu, over which was a strong-looking bridge hung on thick wires, but which swung about in a very uncomfortable manner as we crossed it

For some miles we noted nothing worthy of remark. The road was an easy climb, and as we neared our destination we had several interesting glimpses of the heights we had traversed. Lingtu was cloud-capped as



One of our coolies

usual, but we could make out its position and that of the Jeylap Pass; and it filled us with pride and pleasure to know that we had actually stood on the summit of some of these far-off, mysterious-looking points in the horizon.

We reached the Ramtek Monastery at sundown, and found the air very bleak and cold round the solitary edifice, with little or no room in its immediate neighbourhood to pitch our tent. The Goompa, as usual, stood just on the top of the hill, and was surrounded with prayer flag poles. Successful as the lamas always were in choosing a good site for their sacred buildings, so that they could be seen from great distances, this monastery might take precedence of them all in the matter of position, as it stood boldly out from the surrounding hills, and could be seen from far and near in many different directions. It was completely destroyed in the earthquake of 1897; being, as an eye-witness described, levelled to the ground in a few seconds, falling like a pack of cards.

We found it built in the usual style, with an outer

court, or double-verandah room, frescoed with brilliant-hued paintings of grotesque gods and monstrosities, with the outer wall railed with revolving prayer-wheels about two feet high, forming a kind of balustrade.

It was because of the bitter wind blowing in this exposed situation that we asked and obtained leave to spend the night in the shelter of this outer court. A few rugs suspended from one pillar to another screened off a narrow bedroom on the raised inner part of it, and helped to keep the cold out. As the big prayer-wheel—about the size and shape of a hogshead—was in the corner, at the head of our camp beds, we made a bargain with the lama in charge that it should not be turned at five o'clock as usual, but that he would wait until we were up!

We slept comfortably enough in our strange quarters, but were awakened at very early dawn by the peculiar sound of the turning of the prayer-wheels, and as the noise increased, accompanied by the monotonous invocation, "*Om mani padme om re*," we found that one of the lamas was walking up and down outside the lobby we were in, turning the wheels with his hand with gradually increasing fervour, as though he desired to quiet his conscience for not working the inner big wheel, by double energy with the smaller ones.

Before we were half dressed, the heavy inner door of the monastery was opened, and some lamas went in with fresh water and flowers to lay before the idol of Buddha. A few prayers were turned with the usual phrase, and then the door was carefully closed again. It was soon reopened, bells rang, cymbals clashed, and chanting began.

We noticed that each man who passed the prayer-wheel railing, whatsoever his errand might be, put up his hand mechanically and turned a few wheels as he went by.

By this time we had moved from our corner, and were having breakfast; the big wheel was spinning round, and

several young lamas alternately talked to us, admired our belongings, or went off to give a few more turns to the prayer-wheels.

It was only the younger men, however, who were thus inclined to be frivolous, and to allow their curiosity to get the better of their religious zeal. In this monastery we noticed that the senior men looked very superior both in appearance and character to any we saw elsewhere. Our presence seemed little or no distraction, though they made no objection to our being there, nor to our watching them when service was going on. When we went inside some twenty or thirty worshippers were sitting on the low trestles, prostrating themselves or taking part in the ceremonies, and the place was full of the fragrance of incense

The head lama was an elderly man with a most refined, intellectual and ascetic face, and reminded me curiously of that of the late Cardinal Manning

D. was much interested to see that the big prayer-wheel, which must have been very heavy, revolved on a vertical axis, and was turned from below by means of a horizontal crank. This turned a wheel over which a rope connected with the huge barrel was wound. It seemed to show that appliances of this kind must be in general use among the Tibetans. Suspended over the top of the prayer-wheel was a small bell, the tongue of which was struck at each revolution by a projection on the revolving barrel. The whole arrangement showed considerable mechanical ingenuity. With Toomhang's help, D. managed to converse with the man who performed the duty of making it revolve. He was a grotesque object, a roving lama of the lowest order, a sort of hanger-on of the monastery, we fancied, but a professional at his work, as he said he had spent his life in doing this sort of thing. When D. asked what pay he got, he gave an expressive laugh, and we understood that board and lodging were all the payment



On the road to Ramtek.

to which the poor fellow deemed himself entitled for his laborious and monotonous work.

From the young disciples of the monastery we got ready information about the road we had to take, and felt a good deal concerned at their alarming description of a recent landslip, on a large scale, which had happened in the immediate vicinity, and would necessitate our avoiding



A forest scene

the new road then under construction on which we had based this part of our tour.

For a time it seemed as though we must take some other route, but we finally decided to make the attempt, aided by a young lama who agreed to accompany us, to show us a native track by which it was possible to cross the landslip on foot. The ponies would have to make a détour of some six or seven miles to climb over the top of

the hill where the slip was. The syces could manage this, as the one in charge of the white pony lent to us knew the way. This syce turned out to be not only a capable man, but also a very interesting addition to our party.

It was 10 a.m. when we left Ramtek on foot, with a difficult march before us. The coolies had started an hour before with a Nepauli coolie living in the place as guide, and the ponies were well on their way. We were armed with alpenstocks, and had one coolie with us, as well as the agile young lama. Soon after leaving Ramtek we missed "Tuko," and sent the coolie back for him. He returned to tell us that the dog was in the monastery, and would not come: no one dare touch him. D. went back, and found him sitting by the big drums, and could only get him away by tying a string to his collar and dragging him off.

CHAPTER XIII.

RAMTEK TO LINGTSE.

A pugdandy—Scaling a rock—The landslip—How we crossed it—A Jacob's ladder—A wayside cascade—Martam—A Bhootea village—Work and laughter—The Rani's rest-house—Teptook's writing—Tikobu—Lingtse—A Nepaulese tamasha—Amenities of coolie life—An arrival—Developing photographs—Travellers' postmen

WHETHER the difficulty experienced in getting Tuko away from the Ramtek Monastery was because the little animal was really frightened at the strange noises he had heard all the morning, or whether some recollections of his infancy made him keep guard over the drums, we could not tell. This was the only occasion on which we had any trouble with our dogs. They were perfectly happy and very companionable all the journey. "Chhumbi" always led the way, scenting the road correctly when we were obliged to have a guide. He used to run on ahead and then sit down, panting, with his tongue out, and watch us toiling up the hill till we were close by, when he darted off again. "Tuko" followed closely at our heels, with a very occasional dart forward to have a scamper with "Chhumbi." They both climbed like goats; and it was wonderful to see them stand within an inch of some precipice, perhaps a straight drop of several hundred feet, calmly surveying the scene without a sign of fear.

Soon after leaving the monastery we saw a white patch on the top of a hill far above us, and were told that this was the highest point of the landslip; the road which had

been destroyed was much lower down, and we had to negotiate a pugdandy which would take us still lower down to the only feasible place to cross. We soon found ourselves on the most wonderful of native paths, descending the side of a rocky mountain covered with trees and jungle. Sometimes the path was so narrow that we had hardly room to pass along it. Trunks of trees or bits of rock had to be scrambled over, or a specially steep descent meant a jump from one stone to another. It was as much as my husband could do to get along by himself. I could only manage with an alpenstock in one hand, while the young lama, who climbed like a cat, and seemed to cling to the rocks with his bare feet, held the other.

We had done a mile or more of this sort of thing, when we stopped suddenly. The path seemed to end in an abyss. A huge, precipitous rock blocked our way and sheered straight down into unknown depths, the two sides of the cut being overgrown with jungle, half hiding how deep the chasm might be.

Had we been alone, we should certainly have turned back, imagining such a crossing to be a literal impossibility. But the young lama, to whom, by the way, we could only talk by signs, astonished us by climbing round the face of the rock itself to a presumable landing-place out of sight, and back again. We then found that there were one or two small cuts in it just large enough to get about half one's foot in lengthways, while two or three jagged pieces of rock, a few feet above these cuts, formed handles to hold on and pull oneself round by.

As soon as he understood what was wanted, D managed it, but more by strength of arm than surefootedness, and when safely round the rock, called to me to trust myself to the lama and follow. "Chhumbi" and "Tuko" cried piteously, so were carried over by our guide, who made these two crossings as easily as he had the first.

Seeing there was no help for it, I prepared to get across somehow. I could never have done it alone, not only because I had not sufficient strength of arm to pull myself round, but was also considerably handicapped by the skirt of my riding habit. The lama made signs to me to hold the first jagged projection, and directed the coolie to put his foot in the first cut while he had his in the second. I had to put my feet on theirs. Two steps brought me into the midst of the danger right over the abyss, and I shall never forget the few moments when, clinging with both arms to the rock, I knew that if the men's feet slipped or I let go, it was almost certain death. I was horribly frightened. Fortunately there was little time to think ; one great effort, and I was a step further, and had turned the corner, another, and D. dragged me up the rock, and I was safe.

The coolie followed, and we continued our journey. But I felt that nothing on earth would induce me to cross that dangerous rock again.

We had not gone much further when our steps were again suddenly arrested ; this time by a noise like thunder, and mountains falling. loud, crashing and terrific. It lasted for a minute or more, and died away gradually, leaving us looking at each other with scared faces, the natives as much alarmed as we were.

This was the landslip ; and another piece of the hill had just given way. We began to wonder what our fate might be, but with that rock behind, I at least must have gone forward. The noise came again, and was followed the second time with loud cries and shouts. The coolies were evidently on the spot, and something was wrong. Our sirdar, after giving the usual call to the man who accompanied us, shouted a long sentence, but we were too far off, and could not distinguish what he said. There was no more shouting, however, but that dreadful noise

came again and again, reverberating through the hills, the sound being caught up and returned from all directions with appalling accuracy. As we got nearer we distinctly heard great pieces of rock, stones, and loose earth fall with such terrible velocity that it seemed as though the very ground on which we stood trembled also.

A little further on we met the Nepauli coolie who had gone with our men. He told us they were all safely over the landslip, but that one had fallen a long way down and been rescued with great difficulty. Though badly bruised, he was not seriously hurt. The coolie said he had helped our people over by throwing a few stones on the soft earth, and would do the same for us. Soon after this a sudden sharp turn brought us in full view of the landslip. Even D. drew back horrified.

There were no signs of where our men had passed, they had been completely obliterated by the last fresh fall of soft damp earth, and the great gaping cut in the mountain was almost perpendicular. The Nepauli rushed forward, and with his feet rapidly scooped something like a ledge in the loose earth, and threw a stone or two in the middle where it was softest. He then shouted to my husband, who made a rush for it, and, though he sank almost to his knees in one place, got over safely, and the dogs flew after him. As D. reached the opposite side the lama gesticulated wildly, took my hand and pulled me forward. We ran our hardest, closely followed by the coolie. Half a minute and we were safe, but at the very moment our feet touched firm ground, down came the earth, and our hearts almost stopped beating as we watched the slipping, falling mass of shaly deposit, with stones and boulders of rock bounding down from the very top, increasing in velocity as they passed us, and crashing down, down, into the abyss below.

We had had a merciful escape, and for a time



A wayside cascade

could hardly shake off the awe that filled us at the sight.

This colossal slip was probably caused by some spring which had filtered through the hill, gradually loosening the earth until it fell with tremendous destruction. The land had broken away from the very top, and made an almost straight cut right down to the base, perhaps two thousand feet or more and of varying width. The place where we crossed may have been two-thirds of the way down the slip, and was in a sort of gorge where the cut was about a hundred feet wide. There were eight falls altogether while we were within hearing, i.e. in about two hours. Perhaps we saw the biggest of all, for tons of earth and stone, with bits of rock two or three feet in diameter, came headlong down with increasing rapidity and deafening noise, rattling down into the depths of the gorge far below the place where we stood and out of sight from it. This lasted some minutes, and gradually all was still again.

The pugdandy now led us up the hill, and the hard climbing we had to do helped to take my thoughts off an experience calculated to unnerve one. In some places we had to scale a projecting rock by means of two pieces of the trunk of a tree, with notches at alternate intervals to put one's feet in. This Sikhim style of Jacob's ladder is well enough for the bare-footed native, but not at all easy for the leather-shod European. I had looped up my habit skirt before starting, but found it very much in the way all the morning.

We had to stop and rest a good many times. On one occasion we sat down by the most effective wayside cascade imaginable. Ferns and twining creepers made a perfect bower overhead, while the rocks below were covered with ferns and lichen; but withal it had a general look of wild unkemptness quite in keeping with the character of the surrounding scenery.

As soon as we had come to the end of this perilous three miles of pugdandy, the young Lama wished to return to Ramtek. We let him go, after giving him a small token of our gratitude for the valuable assistance he had been to us. We were then on a comparatively easy road, quite close to Martam. This place we reached at midday, and found that the syces had just arrived with the ponies.



A wayside rest

Here we all had a long rest and ate our lunch. It was a pretty spot and the weather was glorious. When sufficiently rested, we proceeded on our way, and felt supremely thankful to be on riding ground again.

We were now in a part of the country occupied almost entirely by Sikhim Bhooteas. For a mile or two we passed through a well-cultivated valley, with smiling fields of corn and millet, potato and rich pasturage. The place

was dotted with the neat, picturesque dwellings of the people, and we met several groups of men and women working together in the fields, their bright clothing and happy faces adding considerably to the effect of this rural scene. It was no wonder, I thought, that the inhabitants refused to allow us to buy their land; the civilized stiffness of a single European house would have spoilt the charming rustic *négligé* of such a valley as that we were in. I could not help feeling quite apologetic for the before unrealized stiffness of our personal attire, which suddenly seemed absurdly artificial.

Going quietly along, we heard for the first time the ringing peal of laughter with which the Bhootas pull a heavy weight all together. They were behind us at first, but turning, we saw a party of men and women running our way, and found they were dragging a huge tree behind them. They passed us with another such ringing peal that it woke the echoes with its joyous tones and filled the place with resonant happiness.

We followed the old road from Martam, and, on leaving the valley, had a long hill to climb, well-wooded and very picturesque, but steep, and it was late in the afternoon when we reached Song. This is a thriving Bhoota village boasting a kazi, or head man, who lives in a fine house surrounded by well-cultivated fields, which, from their appearance when we saw them, promised an abundant harvest.

On reaching the top of the hill we came to an open, grass-covered slope, and immediately decided that this would be a capital place in which to pitch our tent.

Toomhang, who had arrived before us with the coolies, now met us with the welcome news that tea was ready, and also that he had made arrangements for us to occupy the cutcha rest-house, recently put up for the Rani of Sikkim, if we cared to do so. It was a little further round

the grassy slope, and as soon as we saw it we were delighted to accept the chance of adding to our various experiences of night shelter by sleeping in such a novel and interesting erection. The photograph we took of it was unfortunately destroyed.

The rest-house was made of bamboo raised on piles ; strips pulled from green bamboos being interlaced round the walls between strong supports. It was all very clean and new, having been built for the use of the Rajah's wife on her journey from Guntok to Pemiongchi, a few weeks previously.

There were two rooms in this curiously constructed rest-house ; the floor and roof being of the same material and as fragile as the walls. We had to take our boots off before we could walk on the yielding floor. Our camp bedsteads would have gone through it, so our bedding was spread on the raised floor which had all the effect of a spring bed, though walking about was almost as difficult as on a swinging suspension bridge. We hung rugs round the walls to keep the wind out, and trusted to fair weather. A shower of rain would have been fatal. We dined outside and admired the beautiful view. We could still see Lingtu and the Jeylap Pass in the far distance, as well as the Ramtek and the landslip. The air was fresh and delicious, and the place so beautiful that we have the pleasantest recollections of Song, so worthy of its suggestive name, and we should have enjoyed a longer stay there.

We slept soundly on our springy couch, but woke early from the sharp cold of the morning air. It helped to get us up before our usual time, though not before the village people, who were working at a new building on the same hill side, had begun their labour with the musical accompaniment of those prolonged peals of simultaneous laughter. They had a wonderfully exhilarating effect on us as we listened.

Before leaving Song, Teptook wrote a message on a tree near by for the two coolies who were following us from Pedong, and were expected to overtake us shortly. A few cuts in the bark were all we could see, but such as they were, they signified that we had spent the night in this place, and told them which way we were going. Teptook had quite a talent for this manner of expressing himself, and that day in particular left many directions on the road for the men behind us.

It will be understood that on leaving Ramtek we were making our way across the country where there was no



Lingtse rest-house

direct road, and as we continued to do this for several marches our course was a particularly winding one. It was, however, the direction to be taken by the new road then under construction, and every now and then we touched this and occasionally attempted to follow it. We happened to do so just after leaving Song, and, attracted by a space of new level cutting, we travelled along it for a short time. We soon found, however, that the easy parts only had been completed, rocks that needed blasting were still blocking the way, and gaps, not yet bridged over, made it full of pitfalls and places impossible to get across, so we left it for local paths which obliged us to make a

long détour round the hill side, and finally led us to the top of a high hill, called Tikobu, where we arrived about noon.

Here we rested and had lunch, and then began a wonderful descent down the narrowest ridge or spur of a hill I ever saw. It led to the Teesta, and was a good three miles, so steep that it was not only impossible to ride, but very difficult to walk down. The road zigzagged all the way, but in places the ridge was so narrow that



Out-houses at Lingtse.

we walked between two precipices. D., who was walking in shoes, twisted his ankle rather badly, but was fortunately able to go on.

We gained the bottom at last, and then followed along the bank of the river through a belt of cultivated land till we came to Lingtse bustee, and there on the bank of the beautiful river, just by the ferry, we found a one-roomed bamboo rest-house, built for the Europeans who would superintend the building of the bridge. It had a verandah all round, and looked something like a Swiss chalet.

Here was a delightful place to take up our quarters and rest for a day or two! A pucca suspension bridge over the river had been begun, and the work had attracted a number of Nepaulese to make a temporary colony there. We happened to arrive on some special holiday, and found the Nepaulese having a grand *tamasha*, which, when we had had some tea, they were only too delighted to repeat for our benefit. Dressed in bright clothes, with yellow flowers in their hair and hideous masks on their faces, they danced, clapped hands, and sang songs with a monotonous refrain: "*Do she reh, do she reh*," that haunted us long afterwards. They were stimulated seemingly by a plentiful supply of merwa. The performance evidently afforded them immense pleasure, and amused us not a little.

We stayed three nights at Lingtse, and so had two whole days' rest. We liked the place and enjoyed the soft, warm air of the valley. The long narrow strip of cultivated land by the river side provided us with pumpkins and sweet potatoes.

Our people were thoroughly happy. There was little for them to do but collect wood for cooking or cut grass for the ponies, while the syces gave the latter an extra grooming. Two of the men washed "Chhumbi" and "Tuku," making more of a game of doing so than the dogs quite relished. None of the men thought of washing themselves, and laughed merrily when D. suggested it, as though he had advised them to divest themselves of an outer skin. A row of out-houses by the rest-house was a sort of palace for them; but the Lepcha coolies still slept in the jungle at night, though they were willing enough to swell the group of those who sat nearly all day long in front of the shanty, listening to one of their number telling stories. These seemed so absorbingly interesting that D. and I wished we could understand their speech and go and listen too.

It seemed to dispel all thoughts of life's cares to live among these light-hearted, easily-pleased and good-humoured people. We never heard an angry word from any one of them throughout the entire trip, and it was very difficult for us to be cross with them for the laziness they liked to indulge in.

The arrival of the two men from Pedong was quite a moment of excitement, in which D. and I joined, asking them how they managed to cross the landslip, and whether they had understood Teptook's messages.

"We were very frightened at the landslip," said one of them, "and my brother fell down a little way, but it was near the side, and a big stone stopped him from rolling right down, so I helped him up and we got over safely, but it is a very bad place, sahib."

Then the other man chimed in and said,—

"The village people at Song told us you had been there, so we went up to the place you slept in, and looked about to see what word was left for us, and we found the writing on the tree and came on here quickly, *mem-sahib*."

And I wondered if our means of communication were much better than theirs.

D. spent most of the day developing the negatives we had taken since leaving Guntok, using, for the first time, the miniature dark-room tent he had made for himself. It only allowed of his putting head and hands in, but he could sit on a chair outside under a shady tree with the dark-tent box on our camp table and develop comfortably enough, giving the plates out to me as they were ready to be washed. This process was less satisfactory than we liked with the mica-clouded water we had to use, and which we could not filter in any way or allow to settle. It was seriously destructive to plates.

The forenoon of the next day was chiefly devoted to



The Læsta at Langfœ Ferry

correspondence. By the time we had finished our letters, Toomhang came to tell us that two Tibetans had just arrived who were travelling through to Guntok, and he wanted to know if he should ask them to take our packet to the post office there. This seemed an excellent idea, as we were now beyond the postal radius, and we found the men quite willing to oblige us. We gave them money for stamps which the postmaster would put on, and something over for themselves.

We were pleased to find afterwards that the letters were posted safely, and duly arrived at their destination.

On the afternoon previous to our departure from Lingtse we arranged to send the ponies, syces, and as many of the coolies as we could spare, across the river, to be ready to start early the following morning. Taking the big camera with us, we climbed down the rocky bank to the water's edge to photograph them as they were crossing.

The Teesta is about seventy yards wide at Lingtse, very deep, and with a dangerously strong current. The ferry boat is made out of the trunk of a huge tree, scooped out roughly, without seats, and about twenty feet long. The ferryman stands at one end with an oar, and sometimes gives another to one of the passengers. There is danger in overloading, but six or seven men can cross together in safety. These crouch down in the hollow of the boat, and the ferryman makes a few strokes with his oar, and then paddles up the river in the calm water near the bank. As soon as one end of this strange craft is caught in the current, it is whirled round and swept down the river broadside on, passing like a flash. A few seconds and the impetus given by the oar brings one end into calmer water, the current forcing round the other till the boat is again parallel with the bank, but on the

opposite side. Another few strokes, and the passengers are climbing up the rocks, while the ferryman ladles out the water his boat has swallowed in the transit, preparatory to taking in a fresh lot of passengers and returning in similar style.

CHAPTER XIV.

LINGTSE TO SANGACHELLING.

Crossing the Teesta at Lingtse ferry Advantages of a small pony—Orange trees—Rajah's Road—Yangong Goompa—A well-stocked lake—Repairing a hand-camera—A tree bridge—Preparing our camp—Luxurious Nepaulis—The Giezhing Mendong—Chaits—Pemiongchi—A fern-bank—A rock staircase—The deserted Goompa.

WHEN the coolies with their respective loads were safely over the Teesta the ponies were brought down to the water's edge, with short strong ropes attached to cords around their necks. The two syces, getting into the boat, held the ropes firmly, and the ponies, seeing there was no help for it, plunged into the deep water and swam bravely. The current was too strong for them to have swum unaided, but their heads were kept well out of the water, and though they were swept a long way down the river, they reached the opposite side in safety. An hour later Birman came back again for the saddles, &c. He reported that good shelter had been found for the night, and also that both ponies had been well rubbed down, and seemed all the better for their swim.

By nine o'clock the next day we had had breakfast and were quite ready to start. It took two trips of the ferry boat to carry over the rest of our coolies and belongings. They would willingly have crowded in all together, but we had heard too many alarming stories to allow any such risks. Nine men attempting the passage at once, some

three months before, had all been drowned. No human being could breast the current of the Teesta, at Lingtse, unaided, and we realized the danger more clearly each time we watched the lightning speed with which that curious dug-out was swept across. I felt decidedly nervous when, having seen the last of our party and possessions safely across, we got into the primitive craft ourselves. It was not very comfortable to crouch down in a wet, scooped-out trunk of a tree, and clutch hold of the sides, but I was surprised to find how little we felt the



Ponies crossing the ferry

rapidity with which we were whirled down the stream. It was like being in a switch-back on water!

For the first mile or two our road lay along the bank of the river and was a continuous scramble over wet rocks. Indeed, the difficulties of the road were so great, and climbing over the hard places was so tiring, that I was getting quite exhausted when we emerged from this treacherous path, and found ourselves in another fertile tract of cultivated and well-irrigated land. I had already been off and on my little pony a dozen times or more.

But this was not unusual. On occasion I may have dismounted thirty times in the course of a trying march. The "chota wallah" was so small that a big stone was quite enough to mount from, and although I rode whenever it was possible, I always jumped off and let him pick his way over specially bad bits of road. He was the most willing little animal I ever had. He never shirked the task before him, however difficult. D. walked a great deal, so his pony had an easier time, and when we had only the two, I sometimes rode his to give "Lingtu" a rest.

On the outskirts of this belt of cultivated land we passed a farm-house, and after a brief delay managed to secure one of the inmates as a guide, as there seemed to be some doubt about our being able to find our way unaided. After this we passed through a plantation of orange trees bearing small green fruit, some of which we gathered as we went along. Turning off the road or footpath we had been travelling on so far, our guide led us over the side of a soft hill covered with grass and low jungle. Here there was no track of any sort, and the hill was so steep that we had great difficulty in riding up. As we neared the top and had to push aside boughs of trees and shrubs, or make our ponies paddle through little streams under brushwood, our confidence in our guide was severely taxed, but we noticed that although there were no signs of travellers having passed that way, "Chhumbi" was still generally in advance, as though he scented a path through the jungle. It was all right, for we emerged at last from this difficult short cut and found ourselves again on the Rajah's Road between Tumlong and Pemiongchi.

This was great luxury compared with the roads we had become accustomed to, and here our guide left us, but we turned off the main road again as we neared Yangong

happy. From him we learned that the place was called Bading.

D.'s hand camera had got out of order ; so while the tents were struck and things packed up he pulled it half to pieces, sitting on the stump of a tree working away industriously in spite of many difficulties, having only a small screw-driver and a pair of pincers he had brought with him. It was quite a triumph when in less than an hour he had got it into working order again. This was the only time we had any serious difficulty with our photographic apparatus, in spite of the rough roads it was carried over, but very many exposed plates were fogged or spoilt because we could not develop them soon enough.

We were on our way again in good time, and continued the descent to the Rongpo Chu. On arriving at the bottom of the hill, we found the river to be a narrow but deep and rushing channel of water, in the usual rocky bed. There was not even a bamboo bridge across it ; nothing but trunks of trees,—slippery, moss-covered, and uneven. The natives thought little of this, and D. managed to get over safely, balancing himself in Blondin fashion with an alpenstock. Toomhang helped me over by going sideways himself and giving me a hand across. A ford was found for the ponies. We then began a severely steep climb to the top of Rabongla. There was a Bhootea forest clearing about half way up, and it made us feel quite sad to see the scarred trunks of the grand old trees which had been ruthlessly destroyed by fire. On the top of Rabongla is a very beautiful bamboo forest where we enjoyed a long rest and took photographs before descending the hill.

Another half mile and we were in more level country, travelling along grass-covered roads through beautiful and fertile country dotted with villages. At one called Lingdamtso, the first on our way, there was a grand view

of the snows. We stopped to photograph it, and took another picture at Barphung, which was evidently a favourite spot with the Bhooteas, as it was thickly populated for about half a square mile. The weather was perfect, and the country looked as smiling as the people. A little further on the road passed through a wonderful series of beautiful natural grottoes and gigantic rockeries, places where the temperature was always cool and the water very cold. Caves and natural stone arches were covered with mosses and adorned with ferns and creepers. Every turn in this marvellous bit of the road filled us with admiration. The sight was unique in our travels, as it was quite a local beauty. As we passed through the last of the grottoes we found another village—Keusing, and after this we journeyed on till we had left the last hamlet behind us and come to a place called Mongbru, where, finding good water by the road-side, we decided to stay for the night.

It was about four o'clock, and just off the road behind a field was a delightful spot for our camp. The soft grass was a luxury, and the low jungle growing about was easily cleared away, while a few trees served for food and shelter. We sat on the grass, waiting for tea, which was soon ready, and watched the making of our camp. It was very interesting. As a rule we had reached our destination too late in the evening to take much interest in the details of the preparations for our comfort; and with night falling things were naturally done hurriedly. It was very different on this occasion, and there was a great deal of merry-making among the various members of our party as they shared the labour of making everything comfortable and even luxurious both for us and themselves. In little more than an hour all was ready. Our tent was pitched, and such luggage as we required was opened out. A layer of dry leaves strewn over the ground inside the tent made the

dhurri spread over them as soft as a velvet pile carpet. The canvas in our camp bedsteads which had become baggy and uncomfortable was tightened up—green withes being stripped from bamboos to lace it where the rope was rotten, until all was made as strong and taut as when we first started. Teptook had chosen a sheltered corner for his culinary operations, had built up his stone fire-



A bamboo forest

places into quite an elaborate cooking range, and already the array of steaming vessels promised a sumptuous repast. The supply of bread we had brought from Guntok had all been consumed by this time, but we had plenty of flour, and Teptook was busy making chapatties, or unleavened cakes, for us. For the next few days we ate these and lunch biscuits in place of bread, which we did very well without.

The servants' pal was ready for those who cared to use it; the coolies had appropriated a small clump of trees, and some had already begun to cook their food. But the Nepaulese of the party, two syces and a coolie, instigated by the white pony's attendant, had done most towards the general picturesqueness of the scene. A small tree with convenient overhanging branches had been furnished with three vertical supports with crossway pieces on the top to form a roof, over these were laid large leafy branches to keep off the dew, and so our luxurious Nepaulis had a



A bridge we crossed.

charming harbour to sleep in. A similar but somewhat rougher one was built for the ponies. Later on, when we had bathed and dressed, Toomhang spread a thick rug on a sloping bank, and we lay and watched the sunset, enjoying to the full the delights of this free gipsy life. We were quite beyond the postal district—no letters, papers, or telegrams could reach us; the world and its doings seemed of very little moment, and as we listened to the gossip of the talkative coolies as they sat round steaming pots of nettle soup, boiled rice and herbs, chaffing each other and laughing merrily from time to time, we

realized how little human happiness depends on material wealth or scientific luxury.

It was pleasant to be roused from the long healthy sleep resulting from this out-of-door life by the merry chatter of the coolies as they prepared their early morning meal or brought water or other things needed by us. We had had to stop their story-telling the night before, as the continual



Rabongla Forest.

chatter they kept up threatened to prevent our sleeping. But this was a matter we had often noticed. While carrying their loads on the march they were silent enough, seldom saying anything unless in reply to a question, or during a general halt. They rightly reserved their breath for the task before them, only giving vent occasionally to the prolonged, low whistle of relief which each man gave

as he placed the thick bamboo support under his load to gain half a minute's respite from the weight on his head and back. But as soon as the day's work was over, especially if our camping-ground happened to be in the mild climate of the balmy valleys of this part of Sikhim, their natural genial, sociable, and light-hearted temperament showed itself in tireless talk round the camp fires, interspersed, as we guessed, with good-natured chaff or merry jest. Altogether a surprisingly attractive people; dirty rags and personal uncleanness notwithstanding.

Following our usual custom, we left Mongbru about an hour after our men. We had now to cross the Great Rungeet River which drains the north-west area. It runs more or less parallel with the Teesta until it suddenly turns eastward and adds its great volumes of water to this queen of rivers, at Pashok, a mile or two above the suspension bridge at the foot of the Sikhim hills. But I have already described this famous meeting of the waters!

The road was a very steep descent. On reaching the left bank of the Great Rungeet, we found it to be a wide, rapid river with its broad channel impeded by irregular rocky banks and many gigantic boulders.

In the part of the river immediately opposite the road we had come, two rocky projections narrowed it considerably. These had been taken advantage of to construct a rough bamboo bridge calculated to last for the few months only when the water was low. In the early summer the melting of the snow, and later the rainy season, caused the river to be in flood, and we could see how high the water rose by the position of the remains of a cane bridge hanging far above our heads. This would be renewed or repaired when the bamboo structure was washed away.

Though our nerves were not tried as they might have been if we had had to traverse the wider span when the river was full, we found the bamboo structure bad enough.

As it was, the river was wide and deep with a rapid current, and the frail bridge would hardly admit of more than one person being on it at the same time. Three or four slender bamboos fastened together with withes formed a sort of irregular and uneven footpath about nine inches wide ; a few more bamboos, some distance apart, made a railing on either side which sloped outwards so as to allow room for the load carried on a coolie's back. There is no danger in such bridges for the natives of the country, but Europeans with their thick boots find it very difficult to get sure foothold on the slippery, round bam-



The snows from Barphung

boos. As we walked slowly across, the slight structure swayed up and down at every step.

The coolies had crossed before we arrived, but were waiting on the opposite side to help us and the ponies. There had evidently been much consultation as to how the latter were to be got across, as there was no ferry boat, and we had no ropes of sufficient length to be of any use. Some of the men were making a cord of bamboo withes strong enough for the purpose. With no little difficulty we scrambled about among the broken rocks and set up the camera to take a photograph. The coolies were in the mood for sport. One man recrossed the bridge and astonished us by partly disrobing and having a swim all by himself in a quiet pool near the bank. Several of the

others vied with each other in attempts to throw one end of the knotted bamboo rope which they had weighted across the river. They climbed the big rock to the left, and tried their best to throw it to the swimmer opposite ; but the distance was too great. At last we put a stop to their fun by persuading them that it was possible to carry one end over the bridge. This done, it was fastened firmly to a pony's neck, and he was led into the water while a man standing on the further bank hauled the rope slowly in, and thus helped the animal to resist the force of the



The snows from Lingdamtso.

current. Both the ponies crossed safely, and, after a good rub down, had a feed of bamboo leaves before we continued our journey.

By this time we had become so accustomed to severely steep roads, often little better than a series of natural staircases, or even a Jacob's ladder of rough rock, that we were not at all surprised to find the Pemiongchi hill we were now to climb about as bad as it could be and quite unrideable. It must have taken us at least an hour to do the first half mile, and how the ponies managed to

scramble up was a constant source of wonder. Sometimes indeed they required assistance, but the syces were very clever in getting them over what seemed at first sight impossible difficulties, and by-and-by we mounted them, and held firmly on to their long manes, when they carried us over parts of the road at an angle of fifty or sixty degrees.

It took us a long time to climb this giant hill. The road, although so steep, wound half round the side of it. We found the map to be inaccurate in this part of the country, and during this march, especially, it was very difficult to say which way we really went. In the afternoon we crossed another river, a tributary evidently of the Great Rungeet. It was comparatively narrow, but deep and still. The quietest bit of water we saw throughout the trip. It had a curious appearance, from one bank being very much higher than the other. A wide and easy bamboo bridge crossed it on a slope. A solitary native hut stood at the edge of the water on the high bank, but we found no one there.

A little further on and we were still climbing up and up, when we again came upon the Rajah's Road; a broad grass-covered path with a species of hedge on either side. We followed it until all were thoroughly tired out. Short as the distance seems on the map, we had been marching for nearly eight hours, so when we arrived at Giezhing Mendong, and learned that we were still two miles from Pemiongchi, we decided to camp there. Our tent was pitched in a pretty and sheltered spot behind the stables of the Rajah, in which were some half-dozen of the most extraordinary native ponies we had ever seen. Long manes hung over their fiery eyes—their tails swept the ground, and their bodies for the most part were mottled or parti-coloured. They looked like circus horses, but seemed quite untamed.

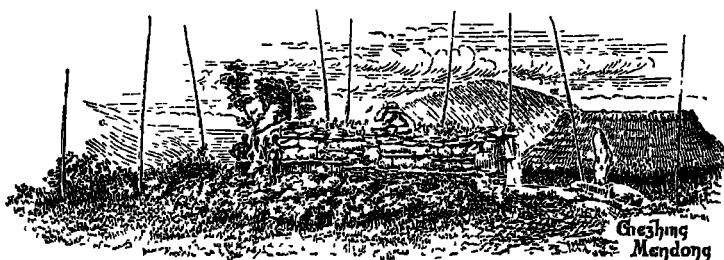
Mendong is the name given to a low stone dyke, which



Pony swimming the Great Kingcett

is a very common object in this part of Sikkim. The exterior is made of flat slabs of stone, elaborately inscribed with holy writing, irregularly placed along the walls, while it is surmounted or filled in with bits of still more roughly hewn and broken stone. The people of the land regard these sacred piles with great reverence. They pass along them from left to right, first down one side and then the other, repeating the mystic invocation, "*Om mani padme om re.*" Hail to the Jewel in the lotus!

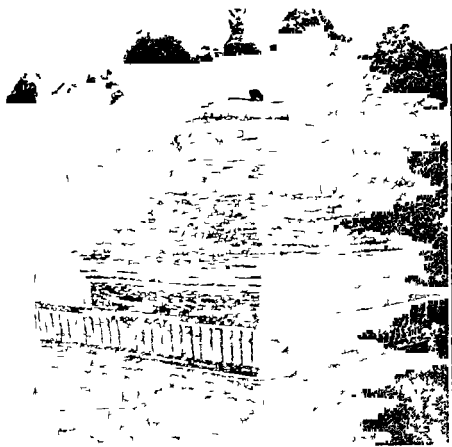
The Giezhing Mendong is the most celebrated, as well as the largest in Sikkim. It measures nearly 200 yards in length, but it is only about eight feet high. Unlike



most of those we passed, this Mendong was surrounded by many lofty bamboo poles flying prayer flags. Our men said it had been built very long ago in honour of some peculiarly saintly lamas who lived and died at Pemiongchi. When the Nepaulese last invaded the country they encamped around it. We found it to be an excellent protection from the strong wind which blew across the hill after sundown. The few followers of the Rajah, Bhoteas, living here in charge of the stables, were passively discourteous, refusing to supply our people with some trifles of food they wished to buy. But this attitude was always taken up, we found, by those serving in the Rajah's train. They looked upon the English

travellers, or residents, with marked though impotent dislike.

We left Giezhing Mendong the next morning, and climbed the steep but now easy road to Pemiongchi. The top of this immense hill is a series of peaks, some of the smaller ones being ornamented with a chaï, or mani, as our coolies called them. These are mortuary shrines or monuments, not tombs, erected to the memory of deceased persons. Some are of great antiquity. They are treated



Mani on the road to Pemiongchi

with the same reverence as Mendongs, but chaits are always found close to, or within a short distance of, a goompa. They are built of rough slate stones, and consist of a pedestal, an inverted cone, and a miniature tower surmounted by a representation of the sun and crescent moon. They vary in shape, some being high and narrow, others dwarfed, but solid. They are often in pairs as shown in the picture of Pemiongchi, and sometimes in groups round the goompas.

On an isolated prominence near the top of the giant hill was the temporary residence of the Rajah. We should like to have had a nearer view of the closely packed peak, but some Bhooteas guarding the approach had evidently no intention of allowing us to do so

A little further on the highest point of the Pemiongchi hill is the celebrated monastery. There is great similarity in all these buildings, but the Pemiongchi goompa is larger than most of them, though the outside seemed less



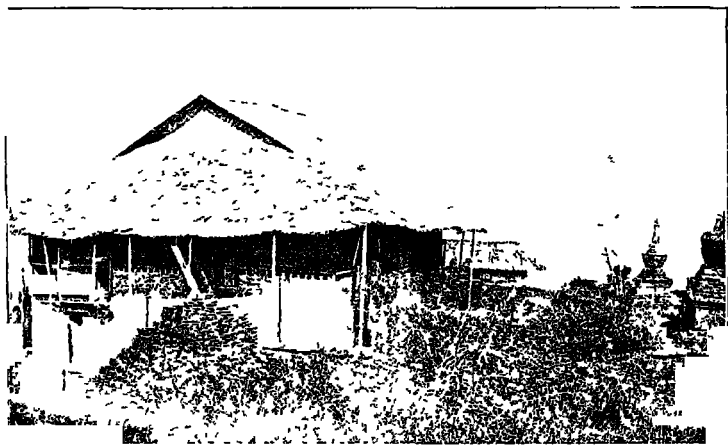
Sangachelling goompa.

interesting to us, because it had a corrugated iron roof. There were also common glass window panes round one of the altars.

Inside was a great wealth of ugly idols and hideous masks, and it was painful to see our Nepaulese coolie prostrating himself with awed face before the latter. Some of the frescoes on the walls were particularly gaudy and revolting; the lamas we saw there were of a low order, and had not the attractive faces we had sometimes met with among these Bhuddist priests. To add to the generally unfavourable opinion we had received, some

cooking vessels carried by Teptook, and which he had respectfully left at the door when he went in, were stolen, and neither threats nor baksheesh would induce the guilty one to return them. The lamas came offering merwa to appease us, but we would have none of it, and all our men were as full of indignation at the circumstances of the theft as we were

The name of the monastery signifies "the sublime perfect lotus!" It seemed rather a den of corruption and



The deserted monastery.

degradation, and it was with infinite relief that we turned from the ugliness devised by man to the perfect beauty of the surrounding scene.

Hills, innumerable hills, rose on every side as far as the eye could reach, some bright with long yellow grass, others dark with primeval forests; some covered with luxuriant jungle growths, others nothing but barren rock; some cold and grey in the mists that wrapped them in a chill embrace, others bathed in floods of light, and shining

against the horizon with their pure dazzling whiteness of untrodden snow. What tremendous irruption of nature could have upheaved those countless hills! Standing thus on the highest point of Pemiongchi, and looking from one range to another towards all points of the compass, there lay before us, I believe, the most wonderful panorama of hill country to be seen from any spot in the

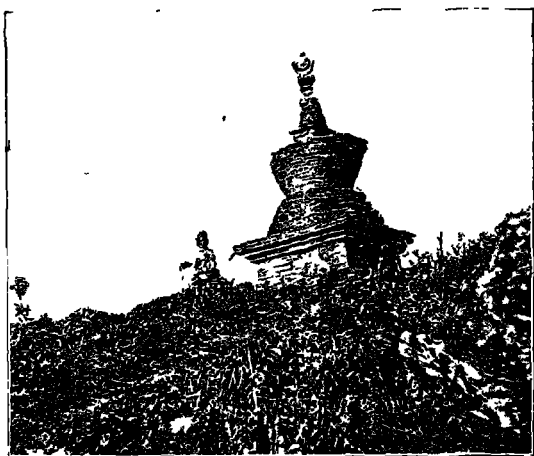


Pemiongchi monastery

Himalayas. It was hard to turn away from this marvellous view, but the sun was high, and we were bound for Sangachelling.

The road to this monastery lay along the ridge of the hill, and for the first mile or two was by the side of a beautiful bank of moss and fern several feet high. There seemed to be numberless varieties of these delicate plants,

but the most remarkable was a fern with fronds not less than six feet long, which spanned, or gracefully festooned, the mossy bank in all directions. Unfortunately it was too much in shadow to photograph, but would have made a beautiful picture if we had passed it in the morning. Further on we found ourselves on the spur of a barren hill which led to the roughest of rocky staircases, up which we climbed till we were footsore and very weary. We came upon the old goompa earlier than we expected,



A Mani.

however; it was not more than five miles from Pemiongchi; and to our surprise we found it locked up, disused, and deserted. It was a quaint old place, and we camped round it, to give ourselves a chance of photographing the picturesque exterior.

Here there was no incongruous iron roof to mar the effect of quaint antiquity. The rough stone walls, thatched roof black with age, simple wood or bamboo work; outside staircases and overhanging verandahs of

the far-famed goompa itself; the curious old house alongside in which generations of lamas must have lived; and the old chaits in the immediate vicinity, all were of the deepest interest. The ground about them was being rapidly overgrown with jungle, and this with the weeds of all kinds springing up between the stones of the goompa, the old house and the surrounding wall, gave a touchingly sad look to the scene, but only added to the picturesque aspect of the place. It was a spot in which to weave fancies, to dream of the past, to long to know more of the lives and thoughts of the men who were impelled to spend their lives in the solitude and seclusion of these hills, and yet possessed a force of character which enabled them to attract others, and make that lonely peak hallowed for centuries.

CHAPTER XV.

SANGACHELLING TO CHIABHANJAN.

Scotch mist—Sunrise from Sangachelling—A hard case—Road messages—A bamboo bridge—Dentam—A Bhootea rest-house—A steep climb to Chiabhanjan

IT became very cold about sundown, Sangachelling being over 7000 feet high, and shortly afterwards a real Scotch mist stole over the scene, wetting everything, so that we were glad to take refuge in our tent while our men took advantage of the shelter afforded by the goompa. We retired early, and that night, owing to the depressing effects of the weather, there was much less gossiping than usual among the coolies.

Having retired for the night even earlier than usual on the preceding day, owing to the drizzling rain, and slept soundly since about 7.30 p.m.—the long, healthful, dreamless sleep we had learned to enjoy as a matter of course resulting from long marches—it was not surprising that we had the good fortune to awaken very early the next morning. D. woke first, looked out, and then called to me to come and watch the sun rise over the snows.

It was about 4.30 a.m., and by the time I was well wrapped up to face the raw cold of the morning air, the faintest tinge of light showed us the outline of the snowy range, which had been so completely hidden from view the day before. D. got out the camera, and we soon had

everything ready for the coming of the fiery steed and blazing chariot of the sun god.

A few minutes more and a sudden roseate glow of light kissed the snow-capped peaks. And as we watched it a faint colour spread over the whole range, deepening to a beautiful crimson blush as the golden orb of day rose slowly in all its glowing majesty, presenting such a scene to our fascinated gaze that it drew from us exclamations of wonder and delight, and the sight fixed itself indelibly



Sunrise from Sangachelling

on our minds as indeed a thing of beauty to be a joy to us for ever. The bold, rugged outline of the distant range of giant mountains stood clearly defined against the soft brightness of the sky. The huge peaks of snow and ice scintillated in the rays of the rising sun, varying from every tone of rose red or amber to a dazzling whiteness, standing out above the, as yet, unilluminated valleys below. We could not take our eyes from the gorgeous scene, though it dazzled and bewildered us. The lights

flashed and faded, changed with every moment, blending into and kindling each other, until by degrees the sun rose higher, shook himself free from his rising robes of roseate hues, and left the glittering range one line of intensest white. Then drew up to meet and greet him the thin blue mists which slowly rose over the mountains. One by one the giant peaks were hidden from view, until at last a white pall of cloud obliterated the whole range, and we could not be thankful enough that we had seized our opportunity and looked our fill on the beauty we might so easily have missed.

After breakfast, when we were all in marching order again and had gone but a few yards on our way, we met an old man coming towards us with a live fowl in his hand. He stopped D, salaamed, and begged him to listen to a petition. We had some difficulty in understanding what he wanted, but with Toomhang's help learned that he was in great trouble, because the Rajah of Sikkim demanded so much free labour of him that he could not work enough upon his fields to attend properly to his crops, but that when he protested the Rajah became very angry and threatened to forfeit his holding. He wished the sircar (British Government) to interfere, and hearing that an English sahib was in the neighbourhood, had brought a fowl for our acceptance, and begged D. to act as intercessor and get him some redress.

The case was hardly one that could be taken up by a mere traveller through the country, since the Rajah had power to compel a portion of his subject's labour—this being one of the usual methods of taxation demanded by Himalayan rulers.

We could only condole with the poor old fellow, whose manner of speech generally was comical in the extreme, accentuated by the emphasis with which he repeatedly offered the fowl as intercessor for him. It was a particu-

larly patriarchal bird, which we declined with thanks, relieved that the old fellow had not killed it

We continued our journey, noting as we did so the general satisfaction with the ways of the British Government felt by the inhabitants of Sikkim, except indeed by the Bhootas living on the Tibetan frontier and by the Tibetans themselves.

We had not troubled on this occasion to see the coolies well ahead before we started ourselves, as the march was a general descent all the way, and would, therefore, be comparatively easy for our men. It was not long, consequently, before we found ourselves well in front, forming a van guard with Teptook, "Robinson Crusoe," and the two syces, Toomhang keeping behind to bring on the men

We followed the spur of the hill for some way over the stony ground, and then travelled along the edge of a forest on the same spur, looking over more open and somewhat barren country. The footpath through this forest, though clear enough, was frequently very puzzling owing to a number of branch turns bifurcating it, so that it was often difficult to know which way to choose. The road being quite new to us all, we more than once followed the wrong path a short distance, and had to return. But Teptook was remarkably clever in reading the signs of the road, and could soon tell us when we were off the main track, though how he did so was a riddle to our untrained Western intelligence!

It was very interesting, however, to note the means by which he prevented the coolies behind us from having similar uncertainty about the way. When we had returned to the spot where the track divided, he broke off the branch of a tree, crossed it over a plain stick, pointed the leaves in a particular direction, placed a stone on the middle to prevent the wind blowing them away, and lo!

he had left a message for the stragglers. Or again - a notch in a tree by the wayside, a cross stroke or two, and they were instructed in the way they should go. Reading and writing were not always dependent on pens and ink, and Teptook's ways reminded us of old stories of the days when messages were sent by tokens and symbols—to be guessed by those who received them.

Some hours' travelling brought us to the edge of the forest, and to the bottom of the spur of the Sangachelling hill. Here we found ourselves in rugged open country, and came upon a group of straggling huts with a few women or children in them, from whom we failed to extract any information about the road. We couldn't understand each other, and they looked sulky and disagreeable. Here we rested awhile until all the coolies had arrived.

Continuing our journey over some tolerably rough ground, we came to a winding stream to be forded; indeed, the road wound through it for a little way. It was almost hidden with trees and shrubs, and the place was so cool and pleasant that we let our ponies stand for awhile in the shallow, running water, and felt considerably tempted to do the same ourselves. But instead we sat on the stony bank or picked our way along the stepping-stones, and drank the clear water out of our hands, dipping them in the prettiest and most tempting-looking places we could find.

On leaving this leafy shelter, the path wound round the side of a barren hill, standing exposed to the full heat of the midday sun. We were getting into warmer regions now, so that in a very short time we were suffering from the unexpected heat and glare. The path was sandy and very uneven, difficult to pass in places, and proved so long and so fatiguing that we were soon astonishingly thirsty, but had hours to wait before we found water again.

That scorching hill-side came to an end at last, and we found ourselves in pleasant, low-lying, cultivated land, where fields of millet and shady groves afforded a refreshing change after the weary miles in blazing sunshine. Soon we were nearing a noisy, rushing river, and in another few minutes we were on its banks, looking with no little concern upon the queerest bamboo bridge we had yet seen.

Two strongly-made curved lines of bamboos spanned the foaming torrent and formed the balustrades of the bridge for travellers to hold on by. From these supports, which were some four feet apart, hung withes, on which were laid, tied together, three light bamboos about as thick as my wrist. These formed the footpath, and as it was impossible to cross without picking one's way very carefully along the swaying line of bamboos—the unaccustomed eye was dazzled and bewildered with the tumultuous white-crested water dashing over the boulders—it being completely visible to the traveller, as there were practically no sides to the bridge, and nothing between him and the dangerous waters beyond the slender bamboo line not more in width than half the length of his foot.

It was not very cheering to be met by Toomhang and cautioned to cross carefully, as one of the coolies, carrying too heavy a weight for the light structure, had broken the middle bamboo.

The nature of the river made it impossible for ponies to cross here, but Toomhang had learned that there was a ford about half a mile further down, so the syces hurried off with the animals to get them over before sundown.

Having seen all our men across, and taken a photograph of this new phase of the bamboo bridge with "Robinson Crusoe" on it, we prepared to follow ourselves. D.

managed easily enough, but I preferred to have Toomhang on it with me, in spite of the extra weight, to venturing across alone. There is nothing quite like the sensation one has in negotiating these swaying structures for the first time, and we had little chance of becoming accustomed to them since each one we crossed was different in style and shape.

On reaching the further bank, which, from the peculiar angle and position of the bridge, we had been unable to see from the opposite side, we found that a narrow landing-place was overshadowed by a smooth and almost perpendicular rock, against which the usual two small trunks of trees were propped, notched at intervals, alternately. We climbed up safely, and then walked on to the Dentam rest house through rich fields and pasture land. It was only about a quarter of a mile, and we arrived just before dark, to find Teptook, who had evidently quaffed freely from the merwa jars of the village, with a very red face, carrying on a heated and animated conversation with no one in particular.

There was a good deal of interest attaching to the rest-house at Dentam, since it was originally a Bhootea's house, but was afterwards bought by the Resident, and converted into a dāk bungalow for the use of travellers. The lower story was, as usual, nothing but a store-room, and we climbed to the upper one by means of an outside staircase. The floor of the large inner room was rickety and uneven; the walls had square openings for windows, with sliding panels, at irregular distances, and draughts prevailed in all directions. Some iron bedsteads, a table, chairs, and bedroom crockery were supplemented by a miscellaneous collection of table ware packed away on the floor in one corner of the room, while another held a curious assortment of hurricane lamps. It was like camping in a second-hand shop. We tumbled up and



Bamboo bridge, Dentan

down the odd little steps between this room and the passages, and took our experience as another pleasant novelty in rest-houses.

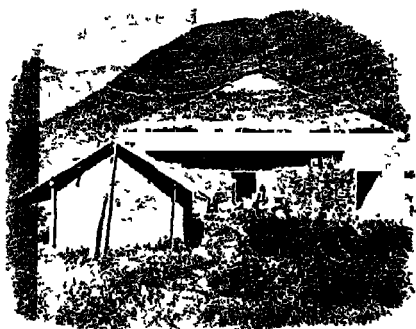
Teptook served us an excellent dinner in spite of his unusually excited state, and we learned that the head man of the village, hearing of our arrival, had sent us a present of a pot of butter, a young chicken, and some vegetables. The latter were particularly welcome, as we had had nothing of this sort but tinned things since leaving Guntok.

The coolies unfortunately came off very badly. They had been to the village to purchase rice, but found there was none to be had, and it was no wonder that they grumbled on being reduced to feed on a sort of porridge made of ground Indian corn.

Dentam is a thriving and well-cultivated valley of mild climate. It is not more than 3000 or 4000 feet high, and our next stage was Chiabhanjan 10,320 feet. For some miles the road lay along the banks of the Kulhait River, a tributary of the great Rungeet, and then we passed through a wonderful forest, where trees, rocks, stones, and path were all covered with thick moss, and where the foliage was so dense that very little sun could ever penetrate it. Little streams splashed merrily along the shady groves, crossing our path in all directions. The road itself was so difficult that twenty times or more I had to get off "the chota wallah" to scramble over some impossible place, and the day was wearing on so fast that we were glad to find ourselves at the head of a very wonderful gorge, that we had been following for some time, and to emerge at last into daylight, though it was to begin the hardest climb we had had.

After a long, steady ascent, when fairly tired out, we came to half a mile or more of open, level country. The ponies brightened up, and we cantered gaily along it,

but soon reached an almost perpendicular hill. We rode for a short way, bending low over the animals' necks; but we soon had to dismount and let the ponies follow as well as they could, while we pulled ourselves up with alpenstocks, or climbed with both hands and feet. The sun sank, and the increasing darkness added much to our difficulties, more especially as none of us knew how far we had to go, nor where to find the rest-house. The



Dentam rest-house.

cold became so great that the exertion of hard climbing failed to keep us warm, but it was impossible to accomplish our task quickly, and a long mile of this difficult climbing must have taken us a couple of hours or more to get over.

It was nearly 8 p.m. when we suddenly found ourselves at the top of the hill and saw the dim outlines of an imposing-looking *dâk bungalow* immediately before us. We were at Chiabhanjan.

CHAPTER XVI.

CHIABHANJAN TO DARJEELING.

Camp food—Travelling southwards—An old crater—Panorama of snow mountains—Singalela—Phullut—A view of Mount Everest—Broad roads again—Sandakphu rest-house—Silver firs—Tanglu—Above the clouds—A bag of letters and newspapers—Arrival at Darjeeling.

THE chowkidar at the Chiabhanjan rest-house was a good deal surprised to see us and our large party of coolies.

We had now reached the furthest of the line of dâk bungalows under the management of the Darjeeling municipality, and it was usual for intending visitors to make arrangements for accommodation beforehand. It was evidently a rare thing for travellers to come from the direction of the Sikkim valleys. Fortunately for us, there was plenty of dry fuel stocked for use, and the man soon had roaring fires in a couple of the rooms which had seemed deadly cold when we first went in.

In little more than half an hour Teptook had an excellent dinner ready for us. It consisted of Erbswurst soup—a German preparation which makes a thick, nourishing soup in a few minutes by putting a few spoonfuls of the paste into hot water and then boiling it—the very thing for a cold night. Next came a hot stew of tinned beef and olives, called Aberdeen pie, accompanied by a tin of tomatoes, warmed also. We had no potatoes or bread, and, as there was no time to make *chapatties*, we ate lunch biscuits with our meat instead. After this came Nor-

mandy pippins stewed with sugar and a few cloves. We found this a capital sweet to carry about with us. The dried fruit could be wrapped in small parcels, and stuffed into the odd corners of a box of tinned provisions. More biscuits, butter, and Rochefort cheese completed our dinner, and we felt that both our cook and we had done well.

The coolies were made happy also, as the chowkidar was able to sell them some rice from the stock he kept for his own use. Nazir had not yet finished the supply of dhâl and rice we had bought for him, before starting on our journey, so that he would not suffer for want of his usual plains food. Toomhang and Teptook ate together, and the old man was fortunate in having such an excellent caterer as his son. We had no doubt that their food was always good, though frugal.

Just before going to bed, D. went out to see how the men were getting on. He found them congregated together in a clump of bamboos just below the bungalow. It was warm and comfortable there, they said, and they preferred it to an outhouse. The very thought of spending such a night outside made us shiver, but we heard them chattering away in their usual fashion, and the fires they had lighted among the trees made the scene a wonderfully picturesque one.

D. and I got up in good time the next day and enjoyed the luxury of a fire to dress by. Teptook was soon ready with our breakfast; porridge, fried bacon, and *chapatties*, with excellent coffee, to which we brought the best of appetites. The morning was bright and clear, though very cold after the mild climate of the valleys; but we had donned our warmest clothes and did not mind the change.

We had crossed Sikkim from east to west, from the Jeylap Pass on the frontier of Tibet, to the boundary of

Nepaul, and were about to turn southwards and travel along the ridge of hills which divides the two countries. Nepaul would be on our right hand, Sikhim on our left for the next fifty miles of our journey

The coolies were all got off in good time To one man we gave as his load the soiled linen-bag, with instructions to carry it to Darjeeling in as few marches as possible.



The snows from Singalela

When there he was to hand it over to a *dholi* (washer-man), and then go to the post office for our letters and papers, with which he was to return along the road until he met us. This business settled, we decided to explore a little round the bungalow, in order to give the men a chance of getting well on their way before we passed them. Climbing the hill at the back of the rest-house, we found what was evidently an old crater, now green and grass-grown, but no less surely telling its tale of angry

upheaval, and the once volcanic nature of these mountains.

On leaving Chiabhanjan the road was again steep and difficult, though rideable. The loose stones slipped from under the ponies' feet and went rattling down the hill, our progress being so slow in consequence that we were soon glad to dismount and climb up on foot to warm our numbed limbs.

In about an hour's time we gained the summit of the first high point on the spur, and, turning back, saw such



The snows from a hill near Chiabhanjan.

a magnificent view of the snow mountains that a few minutes sufficed for us to get out the camera, and endeavour to obtain a picture of the marvellous panorama stretched before us. In the immediate foreground, a dark hill, sparsely covered with dwarf rhododendron and stunted fir trees, showed the winding road by which we had just skirted its saddle. Beyond this, range after range of wild and barren hills stretched in seemingly parallel lines, and beyond these, again, at an apparently far greater elevation, a wide barrier of snow mountains

stood boldly out against the sky in all the dazzling glory of their immutable whiteness. They looked startlingly near; and as we gazed upon their wondrous beauty we felt their icy breath upon our faces, and were filled with awe at the thought of the eternal solitude in which they stood. Unapproachable as we knew them to be, in one sense they were not far off; the middle group of snow-clad peaks was little more than a dozen miles in a direct line from where we stood. While the great Kinchinjunga itself, standing out in the clear atmosphere with massive squareness as its most striking characteristic, and with its double peak plainly discernible, was only twenty-five miles off as the crow flies. The great cone of Pandim rose on our right, but the entire snow circle filled a space on the horizon too wide to be taken in at one glance, and the lens of the camera failed to reproduce the magnificent panorama spread before us.

Continuing our road, we travelled on for another mile or more, still climbing higher, until we reached the summit of Singalela, 12,130 feet, the highest point of the ridge of hills along which we had to travel. We were now a hundred feet higher than Gnatong Fort, but noticed with surprise that neither we nor the ponies were inconvenienced by the shortness of breath which had compelled us to stop every few yards when journeying on the eastern heights of Sikkim. At first we were inclined to suppose that we had become more accustomed to rarified air, and hence our immunity, but on comparing notes afterwards with other travellers, we found that for some reason or other the western heights of Sikkim, although actually nearer to the snowy range, are far less trying in this respect than even lesser elevations in the neighbourhood of Gnatong.

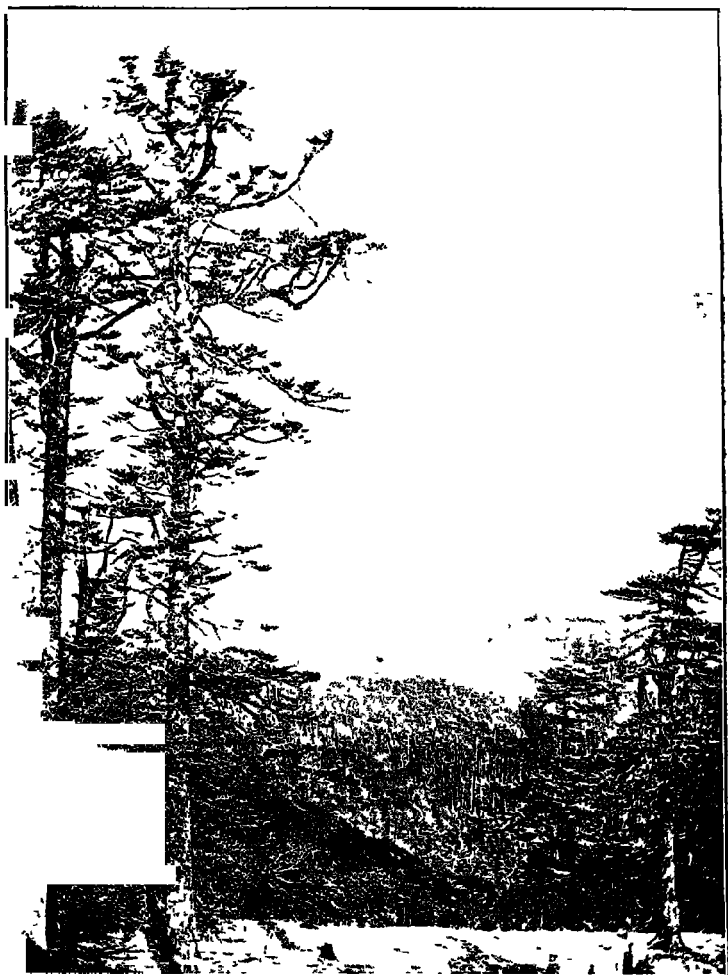
The view of the snows from Singalela was even more beautiful than from the nearer point, and, taking

advantage of a few wind-battered firs in the immediate foreground, we took another series of photographs showing much the same view as before. Fortune had favoured us by giving us one of those perfectly bright mornings, with absolutely clear atmosphere, free from mist and fleecy cloud, that are so rare in these altitudes as to be very seldom met with except for a brief half hour at early dawn. But here were we photographing to our heart's content at eleven o'clock, without a sign of rising mist to dim the marvellous brightness of the scene. It was with real reluctance that we at last tore ourselves away, and, turning to go down the hill, saw no more of those wondrous snows that day.



There is very little vegetation on the Singalela range; what there is being similar to that found near Gnatong. Broken, stunted silver firs, small solid bamboos, and the poisonous dwarf rhododendron which compels Tibetan shepherds to muzzle their cattle when they drive them along this spur to winter pastures in the valley below. But the heights of Singalela are said to be the favourite haunt of aconite collectors, as the herb grows freely upon them.

We were now half way to our destination, and had no more difficult roads to negotiate. From this point the path was a gradual descent leading us through grassy hollows, little attempts at forest in sheltered corners,



On the road to Darjeeling, near Phüllut.

by tiny springs dancing in the sunlight. Protected from the biting cold to which we had been exposed all the morning, we soon found a tempting spot to eat our lunch in. "Robinson Crusoe," who was just above us, following a *pugdandy* in his usual light-hearted way, holding up one of our umbrellas, and smiling happily to himself, heedless of D.'s chaffing remarks about his complexion, was speedily summoned to bring the luncheon-basket. As usual in these cold regions, Teptook had provided us with a stew of meat and vegetables, which, put in the Norwegian stove, boiling hot, proved just warm enough to be pleasant eating by the time we were ready for it.

The lowest part of our road that day was 11,260 feet, from which point there was a gentle rise to Phullut, 11,810 feet. This was our destination, and by the time we reached the dāk bungalow a mist had risen, wrapping us and everything about us in its chill embrace.

Although it was still some hours from sundown when we arrived at Phullut, the thin white mist prevented us from seeing much of the immediate surroundings. A thin coating of snow covered the hill-side, and it was very cold. We were not long in discovering that there was no chowkidar at the rest-house, this worthy had carefully secured the front doors, and left the place in charge of a weak and sickly old man, who was only just able to answer our questions, and quite unfit to render us help of any kind. We were prepared to break one of the doors open, when Birman found a way in from the back and let us in. There was fuel in the house, so the syces lighted a fire, by which we rested comfortably enough until the coolies and servants, dropping in one by one, had all arrived.

The next morning dawned fairly bright, and gave us another view of the snows, but Kinchinjunga and its attendant mountains were partially obscured by mist. When

not far from the bungalow, our Nepauli syces showed us a road down the side of the ridge we were on which led into Nepaul, and which, they told us, was one of the most used roads leading from their country into Sikhim. We followed the path for a few yards beyond the white boundary pillar, and looked down into a broad valley with a river winding through it. The general character of the country seemed very similar to that of Sikhim, but from what we saw of it, both here and in passing all along the boundary range of hills, it looked more fertile, and was certainly infinitely better cultivated.

The Nepaulis are born agriculturists, and it is because every bit of land in their country is taken up that there is such steady emigration into Sikhim.

We were next taken to a slight eminence to the right of the Nepaul road, and here we had a sudden and most unexpectedly beautiful view of Mount Everest. For the first and only time we had a perfect sight of this the highest mountain in the world. But it showed itself to us now in all its graceful beauty. Quite opposite in character to its rival brother—Everest rears its lofty cone-shaped head against the sky, rising so far above the hills around it as to more than double the effect of its majestic height. Kinchinjunga impresses the beholder with its square solidity and hugeness; Everest with its more delicate beauty and colossal height.

We had no difficult roads to traverse after leaving Phullut. From this point to Darjeeling the path was broad and easy, good enough for a light trap; and though there were ascents and descents the whole way, there were no abnormally steep gradients, the road being a made one, kept in excellent repair. For this reason we thought little of the twelve miles' march to Sandakphu, riding along at a steady trot, or easy canter, nearly all the way.

From the Subarkum hill, which was rather more than a

third of the way, we took a photograph of the country round Phullut. It was barren for the most part, grassy knolls for the summits of the hills, gentle undulations, or rocky protuberances partially covered with the dwarf species of rhododendron, and only the valleys of most sheltered slopes were poorly clad with gnarled and weather-beaten fir trees. On the other side of the Subarkum hill there was a marked improvement in vegetation, and the road passed above some of the most beautiful



Tonglu Rest-house

forests of silver fir, bamboo and rhododendron we had seen.

We reached the Sandakphu rest-house, 11,930 feet—rather higher than Phullut—without passing a single traveller, but it was probably too late in the year for Tibetan traders to venture over the northern passes.

There was a sharp hoar-frost at Sandakphu during the night, and the ground was still white with it when we started on our next morning's march. It was so cold that we were glad to take our alpenstocks, and travel on

foot for the first mile or two of the way. It was down hill, and the road passed through more forests of silver fir. Later on we stopped and took a photograph of the slope of a hill, on the upper part of which a massive rocky protuberance stood out in bold relief, having the appearance of some grand old castle, as we saw it through the forest of broken deodars which covered the lower part of the hill-side.

At the foot of the Sandakphu hill we came upon a small lake, called by the natives Kalipokhrī, or black water, on account of the lamp-black hue of its waters.

From this point the road went up and down pretty continuously until we came to a steeper climb up the side of Mount Tonglu. Forests of bamboo lined the road here, and then we came to more grassy, undulating country, along which we could ride at a fair rate until we arrived at the Tanglu dāk bungalow at an elevation of 10,074 feet.

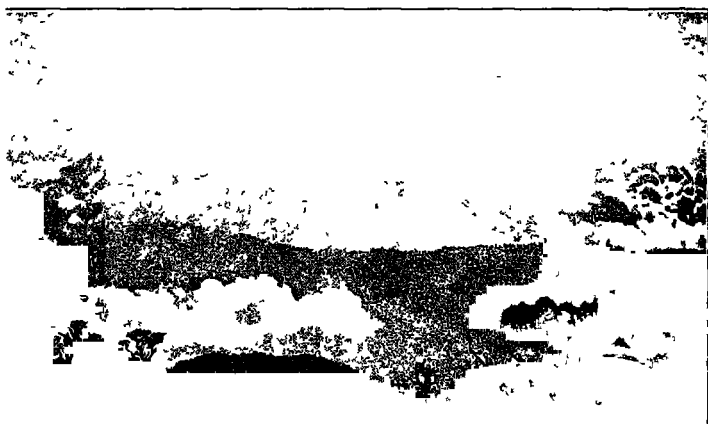
The site of this rest-house is a specially happy one, as from it the traveller can obtain a bird's-eye glimpse of the plains of North Bengal, with a sight of several rivers running through them, as well as a fine view of the snowy range on the one hand, and of Darjeeling and its neighbourhood on the other. We were not so highly favoured as to see all these things, the plains being altogether hidden from us. When we arrived at the bungalow the mists were already gathering round us, as they had done the previous day. There was a little snow on the ground, and we had another sharp frost at night.

We were not disappointed the next morning in our expectation of a fine view of the snows. We were never tired of gazing at the different aspects of this wonderful range, and although it was now very much further from us, its attraction was as great as ever. D. took a photograph of the snows with the rest-house in the foreground ; and then another of a remarkable and entirely novel sight.



Darjeeling

As the sun rose in the heavens it drew the clouds up from the plains below, and before we went in to breakfast they had collected in great masses just below the Tonglu hill, so that we looked down upon what seemed like a great sea of fleecy cloud, on one level, and yet broken up like foaming waters shining in the sunlight. For an hour or more this sea of cloud, covering half the surrounding country, hung as though spell-bound below us; while above and all about us the atmosphere was clear,



Cloud scene at Tonglu.

bright, and absolutely cloudless. The sight was quite unique in our experience, and was very beautiful.

For the first part of the march from Tonglu, the path was a rapid descent. In five miles we dropped three thousand feet, but after this, with occasional ascents and descents, the road was on about the same level all the way to Darjeeling.

Once more we were in the region of beautiful jungle forest. Here were not only flourishing firs and graceful bamboos, but also oak and chestnut trees, giant laurels,

magnolias and holly bushes, with an undergrowth of the unrivalled gold and silver ferns, and long thick trailing mosses for which this district is so justly famous. We saw the forest at its very best. Autumn tints added their attraction to its perennial beauty; and our attention was continually drawn to the brilliant scarlet red, or bright golden-brown of some of the leaves. These were so bright indeed, that as the sun shone upon them through the trees, the high bank running along the side of the road in front of us was as gay as though adorned with a mass of gorgeous flowers.

At the outskirts of the forest we met the coolie who had been sent in to Darjeeling for our letters and papers. He had quite a large bag full. We promptly dismounted, sat down in the shade of a fine old oak, and spent the next hour reading our correspondence and skimming the news of the fortnight we had been beyond the postal limits.

On leaving Tonglu, we had intended to make for Jor Pokhri, where there was said to be a bungalow a little off the main road. On coming to the place where the path leading to it branched off from the one we were on, we turned down it and rode for quite a long way without finding the rest-house. To what extent the post-bag was responsible for having unsettled us, I can hardly say, but it probably had a good deal to do with our sudden determination to give up looking for the Jor Pokhri rest-house and go straight on to Darjeeling that night, making a march of eighteen miles from Tonglu. There was some fear too that the fine weather we had had so long might break up, and we knew that our Lepcha coolies were beginning to get anxious to return to their homes in Kalimpong. Turning the ponies' heads round, we cantered back to the road we had left in time to prevent the coolies making for Jor Pokhri. They were lightly loaded,

and were too anxious to get back into the region of native bazaars to mind the extra distance.

A few miles further and we reached Goom—five miles from Darjeeling. As we rode up the hill the mail train from Calcutta stopped at the little station. In less than five minutes D. and I., with Nazir, the two dogs and our hand-bags had got into the train and were finishing our march in luxurious ease. We left instructions with Toomhang to bring the men on that night or let them come early in the morning as they chose. It was getting dark when we got out of the train at Darjeeling and climbed up to Woodlands Hotel, but we were in time to join the table-d'hôte dinner.

Our six weeks' journey was over

THE END

